



THE BUFFALO BILL STORIES

The Only Publication authorized by the Hon. W.F. Cody ("BUFFALO BILL")

Issued Weekly. by Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered as Second Class Matter at New York Post Office by STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 5.

Price, Five Cents.

BUFFALO BILL'S GOLD GUARD

OR
FORT FETTERMAN'S GIRL IN GRAY



BY
THE AUTHOR OF
'BUFFALO BILL'

AT THE WORD FROM BUFFALO BILL, THE SCOUTS FIRED, AND THE SIX OUTLAWS DROPPED AS ONE MAN.



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OR,

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By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

THE HOLD-UP OF THE OVERLAND COACH.

"I heerd yer pipe up with thet sweet voice o' yourn, miss, a few notes this mornin', an', if yer only wud sing a leetle I'd feel o'bleeged."

So said Frank Fox, the stage driver of the Overland coach, on the trail to Fetterman, and he had dismounted from his box and stood hat in hand by the coach door.

There was but one passenger within, a young and very pretty girl, for she could not be over twenty.

Her face reddened at the request and she replied:

"I thank you for the compliment, driver, and I did sing a few notes, forgetting where I was. But how would it sound out here in these wild mountains?"

"Sweeter than bird music, miss; so please do, for it would tarn my thoughts away back to home, and it's good fer a man ter think back sometimes—it makes him better."

"But may it not bring the road agents, of whom I have heard such terrible accounts?"

"If ther road agents means ter hold us up, miss, they is already in waitin', an' maybe hearin' you sing may help them ter think of their devil's work."

"Have you any song you care to have me sing?"

"'Home, Sweet Home' allus pulls at my heartstrings, miss, but don't stop at that, please, if you'll be so good."

The fair passenger smiled, and, Frank Fox mounting his box, drove on, just as the rich, clear voice of the girl broke forth into the melody of "Home, Sweet Home."

The driver listened, and, could the singer have seen his rough, weather-beaten face, she would have observed its softened look and that tears fell from his eyes, showing how deeply his heart was touched and that memory had carried him back to his boyhood home of long ago.

"Nothing like that, miss, was ever heerd in these mountains, unless angils has sung here."

"I thank yer, miss, an' does yer know a song I've heerd my mother sing called, 'Backward, tarn backward, oh, Time, in your flight'?"

In answer, the girl at once complied, singing the old

song in a way that would have moved deeply, rougher men than Frank Fox.

He had forgotten where he was, his horses went slowly along the trail, and in the words of the song, it had "made him a child again."

"Halt! you are my game!"

"Hands up, Frank Fox!"

The last note of the song was dying on the lips of the young girl, as the rude, threatening voice of the road agent broke in so sharply and startlingly.

Recalled to himself, and seeing but one horseman in sight, Frank Fox, with a fair passenger in the coach and a rich freight along, determined to attempt to run the gantlet.

Shouting to his horses, he at once drew a revolver to fire, but the act was fatal, as a shot came from behind a large tree, piercing his brain, and he pitched forward, falling upon the heavy brake on which his foot rested, thus checking the horses by locking the coach wheels.

The girl uttered no outcry, though she felt that harm had befallen the driver, and she saw a horseman, revolver in hand, riding toward the coach, while a man on foot advanced on the other side.

"Ah! the sweet singer—and handsome, too," rudely cried the horseman.

But he said no more, as a clear, manly voice cried:

"Hands up, or die, Devil Dan!"

The passenger's first thought was that it must be Frank Fox, but she saw a horseman dash up over the ridge of the hill, and heard the startled cry of the road agents:

"Buffalo Bill!"

Then followed several rapid shots, and the quick result the young girl witnessed, and more, she became an actor in the fatal tragedy there on that wild Overland trail.

CHAPTER II.

BUFFALO BILL HAS SOMETHING TO SAY.

The Overland coach was an hour late at Fort Fetterman, and the fact gave rise to much anxiety.

Frank Fox was one of the safest and luckiest drivers on the trail, and few could remember when he had ever come in over half an hour late at farthest, and then something had happened out of the usual.

Now Colonel Dandridge was particularly anxious, as it was well known to him that Frank Fox was to bring considerable money through in the hands of a paymaster.

All eyes were strained across the country, watching for the coach to appear in sight, and the colonel was just about to give an order to send a detachment of cavalry out to look up the coach, when a cry arose:

"There she comes!"

Far away the coach rolled into sight, and was greeted

with a cheer by officers and men alike, while the colonel's face brightened visibly.

"You know I had double cause for anxiety, major, as I do not doubt that our new school teacher, Miss Hughes, is on the coach, as her letter stated that she would arrive about this time."

"Yes, sir, and I hope Fox has gotten through without trouble," said Major Colfax.

"The coach is coming in, all right, sir, but that is not Frank Fox on the box," called out Post Adjutant Bruce Bailey, who had a field glass to his eyes.

"Then some harm has befallen Fox—do you make out who the driver is, Captain Bailey?"

"Yes, colonel, it's Buffalo Bill!"

"Then my mind is relieved, if Buffalo Bill is there."

"Yes, sir, and the one by his side on the box is a woman."

"The teacher, Miss Hughes—but what has become of Fox?"

"He is not there, sir, and now I see that Cody is not driving, colonel."

"Then who is?"

"Miss Hughes, if it is she, and she handles the ribbons like an expert."

"She is certainly sending the team along at a rattling pace, and doing it well in spite of the rough trail; but Cody must know what he is about to trust her," said Major Colfax.

"Buffalo Bill's right arm is in a sling, sir, as I can plainly see now," said Adjutant Bailey.

"Then there has been a hot time on the trail, that is certain," said the colonel.

Every eye was now fixed upon the coming coach, the six horses being sent along the trail at a smart pace, and it could soon be plainly seen that a woman was on the box with Buffalo Bill, for all knew the great scout could not be mistaken for any one else, and more, the driver was his companion, whoever she might be.

"She is a dandy driver."

"You bet, she's handled the ribbons before."

"If she is the new school teacher she's a good one."

"Wonder where Frank Fox is."

"Look at her use the whip, will you?"

"I bet a month's pay she is a beauty."

"I'll take the wager, Lennox, for she drives too well to also possess the virtue of good looks."

So ran the comments as the stage came on, and later, at the same slapping pace, passed into the stockade gate and drew rein before headquarters, while the fort rang with the cheers, that greeted the fair driver and the scout, Buffalo Bill.

"Guess you've won your bet, Lennox," called out Lieutenant Bradley Mayo, and he added:

"For she is as pretty as red shoes."

All knew that something serious had happened, for Buffalo Bill's right arm rested in a handkerchief fastened around his neck, and his face wore a serious look.

All eyes, too, were upon his companion.

She was dressed in a gray traveling dress, that fitted a perfect form, and she wore a slouch hat of the same hue as the dress, while her face, flushed with excitement, was certainly beautiful.

"Colonel Dandridge, this is Miss Kate Hughes, sir, and to her pluck is due that the stage and treasure comes in, for she saved my life and poor Frank Fox is dead, sir, and with Devil Dan and one of his gang, is in the coach."

Such was Buffalo Bill's rapid introduction of the young girl, and explanation of the tragedy back on the Overland trail.

Colonel Dandridge at once warmly greeted the fair passenger and led her to where his wife stood, while he ordered the surgeon to be at once sent to his quarters, where he told Buffalo Bill to accompany him.

"I hope you are not severely hurt, Scout Cody," he said.

"No, sir, though the bullet struck the bone and stuffed my arm for a while."

and poor Fox was killed?"

capt. "Yes, sir, another good man gone; but he had company, for I killed Devil Dan as I came up, and not seeing his pard on the other side of the coach, he fired on me, giving me this wound, and it knocked my revolver out of my hand; but before he could fire again that plucky girl shot him through the heart, thus saving my life, and the third man got away."

"An exciting scene while it lasted."

"Indeed it was, sir, but that girl is the best I know, for she dressed my wounded arm, and then helped me put the bodies of Fox and the two outlaws in the coach, after which she said she would take the reins, as she had often driven her father's four-in-hand coach over the Tennessee mountains."

"She is a gem, and I am glad we have got such a one for teacher of our children here. But how was Fox killed?"

"I heard a voice in song, sir, as I approached the trail, and Miss Hughes was singing—just wait until you hear her, sir, for she can beat any bird I ever heard."

"Then there came a shot, and it was the death of poor Frank Fox."

"I spurred forward, and I was just in time to take a hand in the pow-wow, and I've told you the rest, sir."

"Yes, and the coach came in serving as a hearse, the treasure safe and a hero and heroine on the box—but

here is Surgeon Powell to look after your wound," and the colonel turned to Dr. Frank Powell, the surgeon of the fort.

CHAPTER III.

BUFFALO BILL'S SECRET TRAIL.

The skill of Surgeon Powell soon extracted the bullet in the scout's arm and the wound was dressed, with the assurance that a couple of weeks would bring Buffalo Bill round all right again.

A great deal of praise was showered upon the chief of scouts for his having killed Devil Dan, the worst road agent that haunted the trails, and upon whose life a price had been set by the Government.

"Now, tell me, Cody, just what brings you to Fort Fetterman at this time?" asked the colonel, when the two were again alone together.

"Well, sir, I am on a secret mission, and one on which I am first going alone, but if I need aid, I am to return, and ask you for some of your scouts, and, perhaps, for a troop of cavalry."

"They will be at your service, Cody; but you had better take them along with you in the first place, though, of course you are not going for a couple of weeks yet, until your wound gets well."

"That will be all right in a few days, sir, so I can start, and, if you say so, I will take John Burke and half a dozen scouts along with me to leave at a certain point, where I can reach them—if I need them in a hurry."

"The truth is, sir, the general has orders to allow no gold hunters to enter the Big Horn country, for they excite the Indians and cause others to go there, while the lands will not be open to settlers for long years yet."

"That is very true, and these Gold Sneaks, as we call them, give no end of trouble, and the Indians are kept on the warpath all the time, and I feel sure some of the bands of white men have been utterly done away with."

"Yes, sir, but they knew they were breaking the laws, and took big chances to go on their hunt to steal gold, which many believe the country is full of."

"But I am sure that there are one or more gangs of lawless men now in the Big Horn, sir, and in danger of getting wiped out, or else they are friendly with the Indians, and that means they are renegades, so the general has given me permission to go on a secret trail and find out."

"Yes, and about the most dangerous trail of your life, Cody."

"It is a tough proposition, Colonel Dandridge, but I believe I can make it, and with a band of scouts camped where I can fall back on them in time of need, to send for more help I believe I can work it all right, sir."

"Better have a troop along with the scouts?"

"No, sir, the general did not wish to send soldiers in, unless needed, as it would cause the Indians to rise."

"It may be so, and you and your scouts can go through a country like spooks."

"All right, pick your men, and start when you feel able to do so."

"But now, tell me, did you learn anything from Miss Hughes about herself, for all I know is that she answered my advertisement in the New York *Gazette* for a teacher of the officers' children here, and of all the letters I got I liked hers the best."

"She said that she had been well educated in music also, and, through the death of her father a year ago, had to teach for her support—that was all, save the references she named."

"She told me she had been born on a plantation in Tennessee, sir, not far from Nashville, and had ridden and driven horses from earliest childhood, while she also was a good shot, and I can well believe it."

"Yes, that she proved, and she certainly is very beautiful, though young for a teacher."

"Age don't always make the man or woman, colonel."

"That is very true, Cody, for if I recall aright, you killed your first Indian when you were but ten, and when a boy in years were a veteran plainsman. I congratulate you upon Miss Hughes' being the all-round girl she is."

"Yes, sir, for I owe my life to her nerve, quick aim and doing the right thing at the right time."

"I shall not forget her, sir, never!" and the famous scout spoke with deep feeling.

"She will be very popular here," said the colonel.

And he was right, for from the moment of her coming, Kate Hughes, the "Girl in Gray," as the soldiers called her, from the fact that she always dressed in gray, became the idol of the fort with one and all.

One week after his arrival, Buffalo Bill left the fort on his secret trail, and alone. But the day after, Arizona John and half a dozen picked scouts slipped away to join him on the trail at a certain camp.

CHAPTER IV.

THE GOLD GUARD.

The scouts who left Fort Fetterman to meet Buffalo Bill, the chief of the men in buckskin at the frontier military posts along that far advanced line in the Indian country, were, one and all, picked men.

They were seven in number, and under the leadership of John M. Burke, a Delaware boy who had drifted West and made a name for himself as "Arizona John."

If there was any one who did not like Arizona John, save outlaws who feared him, the man was not known to Burke's comrades.

Gentle as a woman in his manners to one and all, as age as a panther when aroused to anger and action, Arizona John was a splendid specimen of manhood, he was proud of the fact that Buffalo Bill, his chief, trusted him under any and all circumstances.

"Pick your best men, John, and you'll suit me, and it is needless to say that I want only those who will cut the dead line when called upon."

"You shall have them, chief."

"And double arm the outfit, too, carrying two horses for each man, so, if we get cornered we can do double work."

"I will, and that means the same for provisions?"

"Yes, for I do not know how long we will be out, I will tell you frankly that our trail is a secret one, for I go as a gold guard, to run out the gold miners who have sneaked into the Big Horn country to steal the yellow metal."

"We will get there all right, chief, if we are backed by a handful of men," was the determined answer.

The other scouts who formed the daring band were Texas Jack, an ex-Confederate scout; Pony Bob, a spare man full of grit who had been a pony express rider with Buffalo Bill several years before. Nebraska Hank Hutchins, Kansas Kit and Buck Nelson.

All were giants in strength, of great endurance, accurate shots, and hence fit comrades for followers of the king of bordermen, Buffalo Bill.

Arizona John had his orders, and he rode off on his trail that would take him to where he was to join Buffalo Bill.

The extra horses brought along served as pack animals, and the men were ready for any work they might be called upon to do.

They had slipped away from the fort by night, so not to attract attention to their going, and rode stealthily through the darkness and all the following day, without rest, stopping only for their meals.

It was sunset when they came to the appointed place.

It was a fertile spot in a deep canyon, with water and grass plentiful.

Buffalo Bill was there, and greeted them in his hearty way.

"This is a boss hiding-place, Arizona John, and within a day's call, by good riding, of the fort, I have to send for a troop."

"Then, too, one end of the canyon is blocked, the other end can be defended by your outfit against a couple of hundred Indians."

"I am going on a lone trail first, but I don't think it will be long before you see me coming back for you, and, perhaps, we may want some soldiers, for I am con-

nt there are gold thieves in this country, though in
hat force I do not know. That we must find out.

"If they are too many for us, why, then we must hunt
corner and send for aid."

"We are with you, chief, but I was told to hand you
his letter."

"From the colonel?"

"He gave it to me, with a number of good wishes for
ou, but the writing is a woman's, and it has a look and
avor about it of a feminine kind," and Arizona John
oniled.

Buffalo Bill fairly flushed, but took the letter, and,
hile the others were busy making themselves comforta-
le in camp, he read it.

It read:

"MY DEAR MR. CODY: You slipped away from the
ert before I could see you again and thank you for your
indness to me, for, had you not come to the rescue of
he coach that day what would have been my fate?"

"As Colonel Dandridge saw how badly I felt at not
aving the opportunity to wish you good fortune, he
old me I could write you, and I now do so to show you
hat I appreciate your goodness to me, and express the
ope that I may see you again some day.

"It is to you, I believe, for Major Colfax told me, that
owe my border title of the 'Girl in Gray,' one that I
like especially, as my father was a Confederate officer
and wore the gray, while now I have become a willing
captive of the Boys in Blue, and like the wild life of a
ntier fort.

"Again, with every good wish,

"Sincerely your friend,

"KATE HUGHES."

"The solders named her from my saying that the little
girl in gray was a trump; and she is, while it was kind
of her to write to me.

"If I don't mistake from all I heard, there are a num-
ber of Boys in Blue with shoulder straps on who would
like to capture the little rebel," and Buffalo Bill put the
highly prized letter away carefully for future reference.

The night in camp passed quietly, and after breakfast
the next morning Buffalo Bill explained to his men just
why they had been brought there, and then set off alone
upon his mission to look up the gold thieves and also to
keep out of sight of the hostile redskins who dwelt in
that country.

CHAPTER V.

* THE UNKNOWN FORT.

Taking out his compass, after he had left the canyon,
which he did by riding down the stream flowing from
the spring, so as not to leave any trail up to the camp,
the scout took his bearings and turned the head of his
horse toward the eastward, by a little south.

The morning had nearly passed away, and his well-

rested horse had made good time, when suddenly he
came upon a fresh trail heading across his way, and to-
ward a range of wild and rugged mountains on his left.

The hoofs of the horse were shod, and the trail had
not been made over a few hours, the scout saw, and he at
once determined to follow it.

Giving up his intention to halt for the noon rest and
meal, he pushed rapidly on along the trail.

Miles were gone over, and it led him into the deepest
recesses of the mountains, and then up toward the sum-
mit of a range.

Still on he followed, and ascending the range, to his
great amazement he suddenly came upon a strongly built
rock fort there in an unknown wilderness, and the exist-
ence of which he had not had the remotest idea.

Buffalo Bill halted and gazed with wonder at his
strange find.

The trail he had been following branched off just
where he then was, and did not lead up to the old fort.

Neither did the scout go on at once, either on the trail,
or up to the rock fort.

He seemed lost in amazement.

It was a rock cabin, he saw, as he the more attentively
regarded it, rather than a fort, though it had narrow
windows and a flat roof.

It was about thirty feet square, and very solidly built,
being about twelve feet in height.

The rocks were large—square ones had been selected
—and it was well built.

Situated upon the apex of a hill, it commanded an
extensive view all about it, and could be well defended.

As he drew nearer, the scout saw that it had the ap-
pearance of having been long deserted.

Yet the trail he had followed led within a quarter of
a mile of it.

But who had built it?

Where were those who had erected it there in the
wilderness?

These were the questions Buffalo Bill asked himself,
yet could not answer them.

"My idea is," he said, at last, to himself, "that it
was built as a stronghold by men who camped down in
the valley, but retreated here in time of need."

Dismounting, he hid his horse in a cedar thicket, and,
rifle in hand, slowly ascended the hill.

As he reached the rock stronghold, there seemed deso-
lation and desertion alone to rest there.

He stepped close up to the door, which had been built
of hewn logs, and was hung upon hinges made from
horseshoes.

He looked in cautiously, and saw that there was a
ceiling of logs, some seven feet high, and a ladder led up
to a loft.

"Yes; horses could be kept below in time of danger, and the men could fight from the roof.

"I can't understand about it, though, for I never knew of a white man coming up into this country so long ago.

"I will take a look above."

With this, Buffalo Bill walked toward the rude ladder and began the ascent.

But suddenly he was struck a violent blow that threw him down on his back upon the hard dirt floor, and right on top of him came the forms of three men.

Stunned by the blow and fall, it was several seconds before he could recover himself, and by that time his revolver and knife had been taken from him, while his rifle had been knocked from his hand in his fall.

But Buffalo Bill was not a man to submit tamely to capture, and, by an exertion of his wonderful strength, he rose with the three men clinging to him.

One of them he hurled from him, another was dealt a blow that put him out of the fight, and the third was thrown against the wall with a force that stunned him.

Then it looked as though the scout was master of the situation, in spite of being disarmed.

His first thought was to regain his weapons, but as he stooped a rifle barrel was thrust through the trap and covered him:

"Hands up, Buffalo Bill, or I pull the trigger!"

It is doubtful whether the scout would have obeyed this threatening command, for he saw at a glance that the man was not visible, and would fire at random; but as he meditated a spring toward the door the man he had hurled from him leaped upon him like a panther.

Then the others rushed upon him, while the one in the loft dropped down, revolver in hand.

"You are a dead man if you resist further, Buffalo Bill," cried the latter, and his revolver was thrust into the scout's face.

Seeing that there was now no chance for him, Buffalo Bill submitted in his indifferent sort of way to the force of circumstances.

"All right, pards; what is your game?"

Though shaken up by the blow on the head and fall from the ladder, the scout was in fair condition, had not the odds of pistols been against him, and he glanced from one to the other of his captors with a cool, searching glance.

He saw that his blow in the face of the one had told severely, the one thrown against the wall was badly bruised, and the third man appeared more than satisfied with what he had felt of the scout's grip.

The one who had dropped last from the loft was all right, and appeared to be the leader.

And, more, the scout recognized the fact that he was

in the hands of as dangerous a lot of men as it had in his misfortune to meet in many a long day.

Casting, however, another glance at the man who appeared to be the leader, Buffalo Bill at once saw there was a marked difference between him and the other men.

There was something refined about his face that did not at all fit in with the desperate character he appeared to be.

Buffalo Bill had cause to remember this in a strident manner later on.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GOLD THIEVES.

Buffalo Bill was securely bound with lariats, the men keeping him covered as though dreading another struggle.

He saw in the four men the real types of the border men, and felt sure that they were gold hunters.

The leader was a well-formed, handsome man, with blond hair and beard, and was well-dressed.

"I think I know you," said the scout, addressing the leader.

"Indeed?"

"Yes; we have met before."

"When and where?"

"You are a man I knew in Denver as Don Milner, you are doing here what you were there."

"What is that?"

"You are a gold thief."

"Ah!"

"You have led men into Government lands hunting for gold, and keep the Indians constantly on the watch-path to prevent others from coming into the country where you were placer mining, and also thus making the soldiers cautious about scouting in small force."

"You've got me down fine, for that is my business, Buffalo Bill—we are gold thieves, if you so will."

"I am sure of that; but if these are all of your party you are bold men to come up here."

"You are here."

"I am a scout, and my duty carries me everywhere guiding a troop."

The handsome gold thief laughed and replied:

"That was well said, cleverly put in, to try and make us believe you are now guiding a troop."

"Are you sure that I am not?"

"Yes; for I believe you are merely making one of your daring scouts alone into this country, and I am sure of one thing."

"What is that?"

"You crossed my trail a dozen miles back, but did not

now that my pard here, Iron Ike, was following half a mile behind me."

"No, I didn't know that. I should have been more careful."

"Iron Ike saw you, though, and he at once set out for our camp by a short trail that took off miles that you traveled following me, and he headed me off on foot and caught me, so I rode on around to our camp, and then we came here to bag you."

"Had you not come here we would have shot you from the roof."

"That means that all of your band are here."

"We are enough."

"You did not build this rock cabin?"

"Oh, no."

"It was built by a band of gold boomers years ago, and one only escaped, and he told me about it when he was dying from a bullet wound he got in a fight in Cheyenne, and I was kind to him."

"The others, he said, were killed in their fort and their bones I had decently buried."

"He told you, too, there was gold here?"

"Oh, yes, or I would not have come."

"He intended to get up a party and return here, but death checked him, and we came."

"How long have you been here?"

"Nearly a year."

"Must have been successful."

"Yes, we have done well, and are all ready to start for the settlements with our find."

"Indians have not troubled you?"

"No."

"When do you start?"

"Iron Ike and I were returning from gathering up some gold pockets we had hidden away, when we saw you, and we are to start at dawn to-morrow, so you came just in time."

"In time to find you breaking the laws in coming here as gold thieves."

"Yes; and that is not all," said Iron Ike.

"What else?"

"You have come to find your grave here."

"That means that you intend to kill me?"

"You are cool about it, certainly."

"I take things as they come."

"Yes, you've got to die, Buffalo Bill," said Iron Ike, and the other two chimed in with him in the same assertion, the leader remaining silent.

"What have you against me?" asked the scout, with the utmost coolness.

"Simply that you are an officer of the law, as an army scout, and we are law-breakers."

"I have seen you before, and so have my pards, and

we would be caught up and hanged, perhaps, for being gold hunters in the forbidden country."

"You have found us, discovered our secret, and though we admire you as a man of nerve, and of deserved fame as a scout, self-preservation is nature's first law, and to protect ourselves we must take your life."

"How can I, single-handed, harm you?"

"You could go to Fetterman and send couriers to the different posts to cut us off, and thus we would lose all, it might be, have to fight for our lives."

"Suppose I pledged my word not to betray you."

"I'll take your word, Buffalo Bill," frankly said Don Milner, the leader.

But the others shouted, savagely:

"No, no; we will not take any man's word when life is at stake."

CHAPTER VII.

A COMPROMISE.

The leader seemed alone in his willingness to accept the pledge of Buffalo Bill not to betray them.

A glance into the faces of the other three showed that they would be merciless.

The scout knew that their camp was not far away, down in the valley. Were there others there? This he could not tell, but he would try and find out.

If there were others, they might take sides with their leader.

Buffalo Bill realized most fully that his situation was a desperate one.

The chances were a hundred to one against him.

But he was not one to give up while there was a spark of hope left.

So he said:

"Well, captain, your men here seem to side against taking my pledge, but, perhaps, the rest of your band would take sides with you."

"You know I do not care to be killed if I can help it."

"There is but one man in camp, for one never came up here, and only five of us entered this country gold-hunting," said the leader.

"And Doc Jones will side with us, cap'n," said one of the men, while Black Jack, who had been the one most hurt in his struggle with the scout and was nursing his bruises, said:

"Yes, we are four against yer, and having risked life ter get the gold we has, I don't see why we should let a man go free to betray us."

"My sentiments exactly."

"Kill him, say I," chimed in the others.

The leader showed no sign of yielding, however, and said earnestly:

"Pards, go slow. I grant all that you say, and I have

just as much at stake as you have—yes, more, for it was my secret that brought you here, and I get one-third of the dust, as you all agreed.

"Now, this is no ordinary man that you would kill, but one that is doing his duty as an army officer.

"You all know who Buffalo Bill is; that he has won a great name, and has risked his life a thousand times for others.

"He has saved hundreds of lives, has stood between the Indians and the settlers, has put down lawlessness, and is the king of bordermen.

"I ask you, therefore, to accept his pledged word that he will not betray us if we will spare his life, and not have it upon our consciences that you cruelly killed a man who was at your mercy, and that man, Buffalo Bill.

"You will feel better for it after and enjoy the more the gold you have risked so much to get.

"Now, pards, prove yourselves men and do as I ask you—for this man will never beg for his life; he is not built that way."

The words of the leader were a strong appeal for the life of the scout, and they were earnestly uttered.

But there was no relenting in the stern faces of the gold thieves.

They were gold mad; they had made their fortune, and it should not be taken from them.

They would take no chances.

Though admitting the truth of their leader's argument in favor of Buffalo Bill; though sorry, indeed, that he happened to be the man who had fallen into their power, they would not allow him to go free and thus have the chance to betray them.

"No, cap'n, he may mean to keep his word now, when his life's at stake, but when we let him go, then he'll forget it, and make for the fort to betray us, and we can't travel fast, you know, as we only has two horses left," said Nick Morgan.

"Then he wants his horse, too, and his outfit, cap," added Black Jack Dunn.

"Yes, he's got to die," put in Iron Ike, savagely.

The leader seemed deeply pained, and looked at Buffalo Bill, who still showed an iron nerve.

"I am awfully sorry, Buffalo Bill, and I mean it.

"Why, pards, I'll give up half of my find if you spare him," said Don Milner.

"Indeed, I thank you, sir, and appreciate your kindness, but if you gave up, all these men would not yield, for it's blood they want now."

"That's it, and your life we are going to have," said Iron Ike.

"Allow me to suggest a compromise," said Buffalo Bill, with a smile.

"What is it?" eagerly asked the leader.

"These men fear that I will betray them, they say, and that is why they wish my life.

"As I do not care to go out of life at the will of several desperadoes, I suggest that you put it out of my power to do you harm—that is, take my horse and leave me afoot, and by the time I can get to a fort you can have reached safety."

"Good! I accept the compromise," cried the leader, Don Milner.

CHAPTER VIII.

A CRUEL ALTERNATIVE.

Buffalo Bill's plan for saving his life was not well received by Iron Ike and the others.

They did not seem to trust the scout, if even left on foot.

"I say no," said one.

"I am with you."

"He's like a gun—dangerous, if loaded."

"Your men wish my life, I see," Buffalo Bill remarked, calmly to the leader.

The face of Don Milner became a study.

It grew stern and determined, and the scout saw that he was making up his mind to some act, and his men saw it, too.

Handsome as a picture, he had that in his face that denoted nerve and strong will.

He had come to the mines to make a fortune, but luck had gone against him in gold-digging.

Going alone into the mountains, he had struck it rich, as he supposed, but after piling up a fortune he went to the camp for help to get his metal to market.

It was not gold.

It had the look of it, but was worth nothing.

Then he had begun to practice medicine, and it had paid him poorly, as he collected but little of the money he earned.

Next had come the secret of the fatal expedition and the rock fort, told by the sole survivor when he was dying.

Don Milner, with four companions, had then started for the gold country.

It would be hard for him to be ruined now by a kind act—releasing Buffalo Bill.

Still, he would do so, and he had so made up his mind.

"Pards, you appear to wish the life of Buffalo Bill—not to escape with our gold," he said, quietly.

"We intend to make sure we get what we've earned, cap'n," said Iron Ike.

"I have offered you half of my gold, and the scout has said we could take his horse, leaving him afoot, and now I tell you right here that the compromise he offers goes."

"Does that mean that you go against us, Don Milner?"

"Yes, Ike, for you shall not kill Buffalo Bill without cause, when it is in your power to escape without his doing you harm."

"I think we'll take issue with you, cap'n; for, having got the gold, I take no chances."

"Ike is right."

"Yes, I say the same."

The face of Don Milner did not change as he said:

"It was my secret that got you the gold, and I brought you here."

"I put up the money for all of you, your horses and outfit, and I have more to lose than any of you."

"For over two years I have struggled hard in this country, and I can see rest and luxury ahead of me now, when I return to my home; but I tell you right here, and I am in deadly earnest, that I will kill the man who attempts to take the life of Buffalo Bill."

"Yes, leave him on foot, if you will, here in this wilderness, alone, and far from help, and with his horse we can make good time and escape before he can put the soldiers on our trail; but, again I tell you, if my life is the forfeit, the man who attempts to kill him dies by my bullet."

There was no mistaking the words of the man.

He meant just what he said, and was ready to sacrifice his life in defense of the scout.

The men knew him and saw that he quietly stepped before the scout, to shield him.

They looked at each other, then at their bold leader, then at the scout.

"Say, pards, if some of us dies, there remains yet the more gold."

"Shall we take the chances to see who goes and stays?" asked Iron Ike.

The other two men did not answer, but Buffalo Bill remarked, dryly:

"It is my idea that it will be the man in your camp that gets the boodle, for your captain has got the draw on you, and he can drop two of you, anyhow, before he goes under—perhaps three—and it would not surprise me, with my usual good luck, to escape free and fall heir to the gold myself."

The men looked at him in amazement, and Don Milner said, admiringly.

"You are certainly a cool one, Buffalo Bill."

The others thought so, too, but, as Iron Ike was not backed up in his intention to let the one who remained alive get the gold, he wavered and said:

"Well, cap'n, I'm not the man to wish to turn against you, and I'll offer a compromise."

"Name it."

"And I mean it, and say take Buffalo Bill's horse,

outfit, weapons, and all, and give him his life, while we go on."

"And leave him to die of starvation, without covering at night, or a weapon to defend himself with—no!" indignantly said Don Milner.

"I accept the terms!" said Buffalo Bill.

CHAPTER IX.

A SECRET FRIEND.

"Do you mean that you are willing to be left here in this wild country alone, unarmed, without food?"

"Yes, Captain Milner."

"Why, it will serve the purpose these men desire—your death."

"No; for I can go days without food, and can reach the fort in three or four days."

"But at night?"

"I can build a fire to keep warm."

"But you are not to have a match," said Iron Ike.

"All right; I won't build a fire."

"But you will have nothing to protect you from wild beasts."

"I'll risk them."

"Say, cap'n, we've given him his chance—he accepts—so what's the use of your chipping in any more?" said Iron Ike.

With a bound, Don Milner confronted the man, and his eyes were ablaze as he said:

"You utter another word, and I will kill you if it's the last act of my life."

"Buffalo Bill has accepted the compromise, a cowardly one for you to offer; but I tell him right here—if he refuses, I will stand by him."

Iron Ike was cowed. He felt he had gone too far.

A quick glance at his two pards told him that the act of their captain had also subdued them, so he simply held up his hands in token of surrender.

He was really afraid to risk reply with those burning eyes before him.

"Buffalo Bill, I would see you better treated, but rather than have a deadly scene here, I yield to the compromise which you accept."

"We are all ready to start, or soon will be, so here you are to remain until we pack up and get off, but you are to remain bound until the last moment."

"I accept the situation as it is."

"Jack, go after the scout's horse, and bring him here, and you, Nick, go to the camp and tell Jones we start within half an hour upon the trail."

"Ike, you go over the range to the grazing ground, saddle our two horses and bring them here, and, with Buffalo Bill's horse, we can travel along pretty well,

carrying our gold and outfit, and having one animal to ride by turns and rest us."

Iron Ike looked as though he intended to resent the order, but the two companions had already started off to obey, and he sullenly went his way.

"Well, sir, I owe you my life, and that I am one to appreciate a favor I believe you know," said Buffalo Bill, when the leader remained alone with him.

"I have done no more than humanity demanded, and let me tell you right now, that I happen to have a little food in my pocket and shall place it for you in the old fort here, along with one of my revolvers, a few rounds of ammunition, and a knife."

"You are certainly a friend."

"When I leave the camp, I will, if I can do so without being seen—for I do not wish trouble—leave you a blanket, so you will have something to cover you by night."

"I will not forget you, Captain Milner," said the scout, earnestly.

The gold thief then did as he said, leaving some bread and boiled venison hidden away, with a revolver and a heavy clasp-knife, calling to Buffalo Bill to see where he put them.

By this time the man had returned with Buffalo Bill's horse, and soon after up came Iron Ike, with the two animals belonging to the gold hunters, and the only ones left of the dozen they had brought with them.

"Say, Buffalo Bill, we want your coat and whole outfit, for the terms are that you are left nothing," Iron Ike said, with a quick glance at the leader.

"Except my life—thanks," returned Buffalo Bill, with a sarcastic smile.

"You are lucky to get that, for this is a case of life and death with us, and only because the captain is chicken-hearted you are allowed to live."

"I am not one to say die, Iron Ike, and some day we may meet again—in fact, I am sure we will, for you are one of those men, whom prosperity will ruin, and you'll yet die on this border, and with your boots on, mark my words."

"That's a threat, Buffalo Bill," savagely said the man.

"Only a prediction, for I've met your kind often before, and know what their fate has been."

The man laughed rudely, and replied:

"Well, I won't quarrel with a dying man; for, if you don't starve to death, the mountain lions will make a feast of you."

"I've got nothing against you, except that you came between us and our success."

"Come, sir, we have had talk enough. Mount your horse and go on to camp," and Don Milner stepped for-

ward and took the bridle rein of the scout's horse, the latter remarking:

"I will make you a present of my horse and outfit, sir."

"I accept the gift with thanks," was the answer, and Iron Ike grew black with rage, for his eye was already upon the scout's horse for himself.

"Have you any papers, or any little thing you wish to keep, Buffalo Bill?" asked Don Milner, unheeding the look of Iron Ike, yet careful the while to keep his eye upon him, and his hand near his revolver for quick use.

"Nothing, thank you."

CHAPTER X.

DESERTED.

The men now stepped to their horses, and Don Milner began to untie the lariat with which the scout had been so securely bound.

It was not such an easy task, but at last was completed, the gold hunter dropping the lariat in a coil upon the ground, as though thoughtlessly.

The scout stretched his limbs, like a man awakening from a sound sleep, and then thrust his hands into his breeches pockets, standing in an easy dare-devil sort of way.

"Good-by, Buffalo Bill, and some day I hope to hear that you got through all right," said Don Milner.

"Good-by, captain, and thanks for your kindness to me."

Leaping into the saddle of Buffalo Bill's horse, the other two having already mounted, and turned their horses toward camp, the captain waved his hand and rode away.

Buffalo Bill merely nodded, making no reply, and stood in the same devil-may-care attitude until the men disappeared from sight down the range toward their camp.

Then he entered the rock cabin and began to reconnoitre.

He saw the floor above, with bunks around the wall, and the trap that led to the roof above.

He went up the rough ladder to the roof, and looked about him.

The situation was a good one for defense, but then those who had built the cabin long ago had lost their lives, save the one who had been absent at the time of the attack, and who had thus made his escape, to later die with his boots on, and, before his lips were silenced, to tell Don Milner his secret.

Curling up from down in the valley the scout saw a column of smoke.

It told him just where the camp was, and he knew he would have to lose no time in searching for it.

Descending from the roof of the rock fort, he went to where the captain had hidden the things for him.

There was a piece of hoecake, a broiled venison steak, some matches, a revolver, several rounds of ammunition, and a jackknife.

Then he mused aloud:

"I am not so badly off, after all, for there is food enough to last a day, and I can reach camp early to-morrow morning.

"I am lucky to have the scouts there, and get another outfit for the trail.

"It will be a delay of a couple of days, but that won't matter so much, after all."

Waiting for hours about the rock fort, Buffalo Bill then set out for the camp of the gold thieves.

He approached cautiously, until he saw that the camp was deserted, for coyotes were already sniffing around it.

This told him that the men had been gone some little time, and he at once went to the camp.

It was well sheltered, near a spring and timber, but with no grass near; so the horses had been pastured some distance off.

A search soon revealed a blanket hidden in some bushes, and in it was rolled a canteen for water, a second revolver, bowie-knife, and a haversack containing some coffee, a tin cup, and piece of bacon.

"That man is, indeed, my friend," muttered Buffalo Bill, and he shouldered his treasures, filled the canteen at the spring, and returned to the rock fort.

Picking up the lariat as he went along, he was passing the open door, when out bounded a huge mountain lion.

Never in his life did Buffalo Bill draw a revolver quicker, and never fire a better shot, for his bullet entered the eye of the savage beast as he was almost upon him.

"Another debt due Don Milner, for it would have been the last of me had he not left weapons to defend myself with," muttered the scout.

CHAPTER XI.

THE RETURN.

The mountain lion had scented blood from the cut on the face of one of the scout's assailants, had trailed the fresh tracks into the old rock fort, and, doubtless very angry, had rushed out at the sound of footsteps.

Cornered as he was, he made the spring, and but for the scout's having been left a weapon, and using it with deadly aim, the life of Buffalo Bill would have ended then and there.

It was a full minute that the scout stood gazing down upon the dead beast.

"A close call—a very narrow one," he muttered, and he started off on the trail by which he had come.

He knew that he had a thirty-mile walk of it, and a rough one.

But he did not complain, considering himself very fortunate to be able to go at all.

He kept up a steady pace until sunset, and then found a camping place.

Getting out his matches, he built a fire in a secluded place, roasted some bacon, warmed up the hoecake and made a tin cup of coffee, congratulating himself that he did not have to go supperless, and that, with the large blanket left him by Don Milner, he had a bed, such as it was, and a fire, and weapons to defend himself with.

"I would have been, indeed, in hard luck had I been left without food, arms, matches and a blanket, for the savage beasts in these mountains, I have had good reason to know," he mused.

Rolling his blanket about him, after throwing a large log on the fire, he was soon asleep, and awoke only at dawn.

Eating sparingly of his provisions, for he wished to guard against accident, he started on his way once more, and, before noon, came to the little camp, startling the scouts by suddenly appearing.

Then he told what had happened to him.

They listened with staring eyes, and John Burke said: "But what are you going to do now?"

"Have dinner, fit out again, mount one of the horses, and camp to-night at the old rock fort, for I must push on as rapidly as I can, while you men take my trail after I leave, and follow on a few miles behind to be near when needed."

Buffalo Bill then set to work to get a good dinner, for he was hungry, and the scouts aided him.

Then he selected the best of the extra horses, put on him a saddle and bridle, took one of the rifles and some provisions, with an extra blanket, and again bade good-by, with the remark:

"I hope I'll have better luck this time."

"I think you had mighty big luck last time, Bill," was the significant reply of Arizona John.

The sun had ~~not~~ set when he rode up to the old rock fort and scattered the coyotes gathered about what remained of the dead mountain lion.

Going then to the deserted camp of the gold thieves, Buffalo Bill, as soon as he had taken the horse to where he could get good grass, filled his canteen and returned to the rock fort.

A fire was built, supper cooked, and then an hour was passed in the enjoyment of a pipe, for the scout wished the horse to get a good feed.

But at last he went after him, and both he and his horse enjoyed the safety of the little cabin for the night.

At daylight he was in the saddle.

The Hills were reached before sunset, and the scout camped for supper on the river, but, after a couple of hours' rest, mounted and pushed on again, for he had made the discovery, during the afternoon, that the gold thieves had not only not traveled fast, but their trail was leading them up the North Fork of the Nebraska, doubtless intending to strike the stage trail at Cheyenne.

Feeling that he would not be able to travel fast in his supposed half-starved condition, and doubtless would fall a prey to wild beasts in his unprotected condition, as four of them believed him to be, they concluded that he would go back to the nearest point, if, indeed, he got there at all.

They therefore felt little dread of pursuit, if any.

"They are traveling slow, and I can head them off."

His intention was to push through the afternoon and night, strike a certain point upon the Nebraska River ahead of the gold thieves, and there await their coming.

If there was a trail to show that they had gained that point, then he would push on in pursuit and hold them up.

"I'll make them think I've got wings on my feet," he said to himself, and he greatly enjoyed the surprise he would give the gold thieves at sight of him.

CHAPTER XII.

THE PURSUIT.

Confident of the trail the gold thieves would take after reaching a certain pass in the mountains, Buffalo Bill wrote a note to Arizona John as soon as he found he was right. This he left in the trail on a stick, and it told the scouts to push on for a certain point ahead, where he would join them.

He knew that the gold thieves had two days' start of him, but he had lost no time in his walk back to camp, had ridden steadily on the trail, and felt that he now should be able to head them off.

"We will keep a very steady pace, boys, for I wish to strike a gold trail to-morrow that will pan out rich, I think," the chief of scouts said when they came up and joined him, and his men knew that their leader had big game in view.

Until dark the ride was kept up, and the men went into camp.

Two hours' stop was all the chief allowed, and then the trail was resumed and kept up steadily through the night, Buffalo Bill guiding, with an Indian's instinct of the country in which he travels.

At dawn the river was reached, and men and horses, completely fagged out, went into camp for rest and breakfast.

But Buffalo Bill began at once to look about him for a trail.

"Spring on a horse, Arizona John, cross the river and see if there is a trail there, leading southward, of three horses."

Arizona John did as he was told and soon returned with the report that there was no trail going southward, but a large one of Indian ponies going north, and very fresh.

"Ah! That looks bad. How many?"

"Some fifty ponies, I should say, sir."

"When made?"

"Last night, I think; perhaps late yesterday afternoon."

"Then the gold thieves have not passed, and I do not think they have gone by any other trail."

"I will tell you boys my racket when we have breakfast, and then it would not surprise me if those we are after will be glad to see us, if they happen to strike those Indians whose trail you saw, Arizona John."

Describing Don Milner, he told his men that he should be spared under all circumstances.

A rest of two hours, with water and grass, freshened horses, and the men were anxious for the trail, so mounting, they pushed on, some on one side of the river, some on the other.

They had gone half a dozen miles when Buffalo Bill halted suddenly.

His quick ear had caught the sound of distant firing.

All listened attentively, and the rattle of rifles came distinctly to their ears.

On the scouts pushed, and the firing grew louder and louder.

At last, as they dashed around a bend in the valley, the men all on the same side of the river now, they came in sight of a stirring scene.

There was a group of rocks in the valley, and right upon the river bank, while among them grew a thicket of cedars.

In this retreat were men at bay, while charging upon them were half a hundred mounted Indians.

The valley was dotted with braves and ponies slain, showing that the men at bay had fought well.

But the Indians were now closer upon their foes than ever before, and the fire of the defenders had grown feeble.

The victory was about won by the redskins, for nothing now could check their rush in upon the men among the rocks and cedars, and wild yells of triumph were heard as the scouts dashed into view.

The war-cry of the charging scouts was the first intimation the Indians had of a foe in their rear.

There in the valley was a group of a dozen warriors with the ponies of those of the party who were charging

on foot, and the dead and wounded braves they had gathered up from the field.

Watching the last charge of their comrades, they had not seen the scouts until they were within a few hundred yards of them.

Then they turned in wild dismay and their cries gave warning to their comrades in the moment of their victory.

The Indians for a moment were dumb with amazement and fear.

Then they saw that there were about half a dozen scouts, and they still had forty able-bodied braves.

But Buffalo Bill was not counting odds, and he ranged his men in line, advanced at a canter and all fired as they went.

Their fire was first upon the little group in the valley.

So deadly was it that the few who escaped leaped upon their ponies and fled.

But the scouts moved on, giving the Indians no time to rally among the rocks, and their terrible fire drove the band in full retreat down along the river bank, where they kept in the shadow of the timber.

A chief and a dozen braves rallied for a short fight, and Buffalo Bill shouted:

"That chief has mounted my horse, boys, and I want him."

With a yell, the scouts dashed forward, the chief and his braves immediately about him tried to check them in vain, but they fired wildly and were again in retreat when Buffalo Bill gave several shrill whistles and called out:

"Here, Buckskin, here! Come to me!"

The whistles were repeated, and with a joyous neigh the faithful horse, in spite of all that the chief on his back could do, came at a run toward his master.

The frightened chief gave a yell, and his braves half halted as though to die with him.

But he had no such intention, for, finding that he could not check the horse, he slipped back out of the saddle, over the haunches of the animal, and striking the ground, rolled over and over for a dozen feet.

There he lay perfectly limp, and as Buffalo Bill rode up he cried:

"His neck is broken, but see yonder, boys!"

All saw amid the flying redskins a paleface prisoner and two large horses, captured by the Indians and carrying heavy packs.

"It is my rescuer, Don Milner!"

"We must save him!" and Buffalo Bill led the way.

But the horses of the scouts were about tired out, while the ponies of the Indians seemed to be perfectly fresh and rapidly dropped their pursuers.

"It is no use, with our horses, boys."

"We'll catch what Indian ponies we can and pursue them," cried the chief.

This was done, and Buffalo Bill and his men went in chase.

The Indians had meanwhile crossed the river at the only ford within miles, and at the other bank they found a natural breastwork, where they could have kept back a much larger force than their own.

"We must give it up, boys, I am sorry to say, at least, for the present; but I would have given much to have rescued Don Milner, and we may do so yet."

With this, leaving a man to watch the Indians, the scouts rode back to the scene of the fight, the fringe of trees along the bank preventing the redskins from seeing them retreat.

When they arrived at the group of rocks where the gold thieves had stood at bay, Buffalo Bill counted a score of dead redskins and half as many ponies.

But among that group of rocks lay four of the five gold thieves, and three of them were dead, each having received a number of wounds, showing how desperately had been their battle against big odds for their lives and their gold.

But the one who was not dead was mortally wounded.

While their leader was a captive to the Indians, he lay there dying.

As the scout approached him, his eyes turned upon him, and his face grew more livid as he cried:

"You are Buffalo Bill?"

"Yes, Iron Ike," and the scout spoke in a kindly tone.

"My God! how did you get here? But it matters not, for your prophecy is fulfilled; we meet again, and I die with my boots on, as you said I would," was the low reply of the dying gold thief.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE NIGHT ATTACK.

The man who had been so anxious to have him die and whose firm stand had left him alone, as that man had believed, helpless and to starve, had very quickly come to the end of his life trail, as Buffalo Bill had predicted.

Had Buffalo Bill come only a short time sooner upon the scene, he would have saved the lives of four of the gold thieves and the leader from becoming the captive of redskins.

Against a foe when down, a man in distress, dying, it was not the nature of Buffalo Bill to feel any grudge.

So he knelt by the side of the dying man and said in a kind tone:

"I am sorry for you, Ike, and only wish that we could have arrived sooner."

"How did you get here?"

"I had help not so very far away, and so decided to head you off."

"The Indians got Don, didn't they?"

"Yes, but I trust he can be rescued."

"I can't last long, can I?" Ike now said, with a frightened look in his eyes.

"I'm afraid not, poor fellow, for you have some cruel wounds. Did the Indians surprise you?" Buffalo Bill added, trying to get the gold thief's mind away from his desperate predicament.

"Yes, we were breaking camp when we saw them coming. We fought them hard, but they broke in on us."

"I fell and pretended to be dead, as I saw you coming, so they swept on, carrying the captain with them, though he fought like a devil at bay."

"And they got our gold, too, but that pleases me, for, you'll never have it, so I have some little revenge against you, after all, Buffalo Bill, and——"

His voice choked up suddenly, he writhed for a moment in agony and then the lifestrings snapped—the man was dead.

Buffalo Bill arose from the side of the dead body, by which he had knelt with uncovered head, and turned away.

"Boys, stake the horses out to feed and rest, for there is sad work for us to do here."

"How are the wounded, Arizona John?"

"All right, chief, for their wounds are not bad, and I have just dressed them."

"Collect the dead redskins, and we will tie them on the backs of their ponies, lead them to the ford and start them across for their comrades to bury."

"A splendid idea, chief."

"But the dead gold thieves?"

"We will bury them."

"That's right, pard."

The dead redskins were first gathered up, and tied upon the backs of the Indian ponies.

These were led to the spot where the scout sentinel was on duty at the ford and driven into the river they were forced to cross.

The Indians at first suspected an attack behind this act of humanity, but calling across to them, in their own language, Buffalo Bill said:

"We send you your dead chief and comrades."

"Palefaces do not scalp and mutilate the bodies of their enemies."

The redskins wondered at an act they could not understand, but shouted in triumph when the ponies crossed the river and came into their midst.

Still leaving the sentinel to watch the Indians, Buffalo Bill returned with the other scouts to the camping place and buried the dead gold thieves.

While two of the scouts were preparing dinner, Buffalo Bill said:

"Pards, I wish to rescue that good fellow, Don Milner, and to do so will play a little game of strategy."

All listened attentively to what would follow, and Buffalo Bill continued:

"You, Arizona John, mount one of the Indian ponies after dinner and ride up to relieve Kansas Kit."

"Halt where they can see you from across the river and stake your pony out in full sight of them, leaving him saddled."

"Then you pretend to take up a point of lookout, but sneak away with Kit, who will also bring his pony, for he is not in sight of the Indians."

"Return here, and we will start at once back on our trail, riding the Indian ponies, for we have enough of them, and resting our own horses of our weight."

"We will go down to the ford, cross and camp until night, when we can move on the Indians and attack them on foot, trying to stampede them in such haste that they will leave their prisoner behind, and that is what we want."

"What do you say, pards?"

To a man, they agreed.

The scout chief had gotten back his splendid horse, Buckskin, which the force of circumstances had made him give to Don Milner, and upon him was his complete outfit as left by him, saddle bags, roll of blankets and lariat, while on the ground he had picked up his rifle.

The scouts had gathered up bows and arrows, to carry along as additional weapons, and there were ponies enough to allow each man one to ride and spare his own horse.

The wounded scouts said that they could easily ride any distance, and so the back trail was taken to where the river could be forded.

Here a halt was made for supper, and then, crossing the stream, the band began to follow along the banks toward the Indian camp.

The scouts held on their way as long as they dared, then a halt was made and Arizona John and Pony Bob went on ahead on foot.

The two had been gone for over an hour, and then they came back to where their comrades stood by their horses, awaiting them.

"Well, John, did you get close to them?" asked Buffalo Bill.

"Chief, they have been playing it smart on us while we were doing the same with them," answered Arizona John.

"That is, they have gone?"

"Yes, sir."

"Went off doubtless soon after they got possession of their dead?"

"About that time, chief, we judged."

"Then they have twenty miles' start of us?"

"All of that, sir."

"And as they have a number of extra ponies along, in spite of their killed and which we captured, they have enough to give every brave one, and their dead, too."

"It would be useless for us to follow them with our force, I think."

This the scouts all decided was true, so they moved on to the Indian camp to stop for the night.

The Indian pony across the river was brought over by one of the men, and a guard being placed, the rest wrapped their blankets about them and were soon fast asleep.

But at midnight they were suddenly awakened by Buffalo Bill.

"Boys, these redskins will not travel after nightfall, and they do not expect us to discover their going until after dark, if then."

"They will not think we dare follow them, and they cannot be camped more than twenty miles from here."

"Of course they will follow the river, and I will go ahead alone, and at a good pace, so you follow, and by a dash into their camp at dawn we may be able to rescue that poor fellow, Don Milner."

The scouts were more than willing, and a quarter of an hour after, Buffalo Bill rode away in the darkness, and they followed.

Keeping up a good pace for several hours, they yet did not overtake their chief, and they were beginning to wonder if they had followed on his trail, when they suddenly saw him riding toward them.

"Pards, they are camped just half a mile from here, and are getting ready to move."

"Leave one of the wounded boys to follow with the horses, and we will move ahead on foot and dash into their camp, but be careful not to fire at random, as you may kill the very man we wish to rescue."

Buffalo Bill and six of his men then went forward on foot.

There were several camp-fires, and the Indians had brought up their ponies, and were about ready to start.

But seven rifles flashed together, the wild war cry of the scouts was heard in the still morning air, and a dozen paces apart the men moved forward, firing at a foe only when sure that they were making no mistake.

The attack was so wholly unlooked-for that the Indians broke in a perfect stampede, leaving their dead comrades, which they were bearing back to their village, and those just slain and wounded behind.

Thus the scouts were again victors, but Buffalo Bill

recalled his men from the pursuit, and asked each one if he had seen Don Milner, the prisoner of the redskins.

No one had done so, and then Buffalo Bill said:

"Well, we have one brave I caught with my lariat, as his horse fell with him, and was wounded, so we may be able to make terms with them."

"Find out, Pony Bob, the worst of the wounded redskins, and we'll send him on a mission to his comrades to try and strike a trade with them."

There were found to be six prisoners, which the brave Buffalo Bill had lassoed, no one of the five who were wounded being fatally so, and the most serious of the lot a warrior with his leg broken by a bullet.

"We'll fix him up and make him the messenger, Pony Bob," and Buffalo Bill sat down to dress the Indian's wounds.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE REDSKIN COURIER.

The chief told the brave that the other wounded were to be also cared for and that he was to be given a pony and must ride on after his companions, hold a pow-wow, and offer to give up all their dead, their wounded and the ponies, if they would in their turn give up their paleface captive and his outfit.

The brave seemed pleased at this arrangement, and being lifted to his saddle started off at a run.

Buffalo Bill at once went into camp where he was, and where the river banks and rocks formed a good defense for him.

The other wounded Indians were tenderly cared for, the dead gathered together, now fifteen in number, and several of the scouts were busy preparing breakfast, while the horses were enjoying a rest and the best of grass.

Several hours passed away before the return of the messenger, and then the sentinel reported an Indian horseman in sight.

It was the same one, and he put at defiance the pain from his wound.

He had overtaken his comrades, a halt had been called, and a pow-wow followed.

He told how he had been treated, and the offer the great white chief had made, but the young chief, then in command, had told him to return and tell how sad he was to say that the paleface prisoner was dead.

He had freed his hands and had gotten to the river, when he was discovered and fired upon.

He had gone beneath the waters and was swept away to be seen no more.

And his traps, which included the gold, the chief asked about.

They had been lost in crossing the river after their

first flight, for the horses bearing it had been both wounded and drowned in coming over.

Buffalo Bill then said, sternly:

"I am sorry, for now we will have to kill your red brothers and scalp the dead, so they will be only squaws in the Happy Hunting Grounds."

The eye of every scout was upon the Indian, for they knew what this dire threat of Buffalo Bill's meant to them.

But the brave did not wince and even change a muscle of his face.

If he had been telling a lie about Don Milner and the loss of the gold his countenance in no wise revealed the fact.

He did not even glance at his fellow prisoners, but after a moment of silence began to slowly chant his death song.

In this the others joined him.

This appeared to be proof to the scouts that the Indian messenger had told the truth, that their prisoner had been killed, as stated, and the gold lost.

"Why did not my red brother tell me this when I sent him to his comrades?" asked Buffalo Bill.

He had been on sentinel duty and did not know, was the quick reply.

As the other Indians had now heard the report of the messenger, it was useless to ask them, and the chief said, in a disappointed tone:

"I fear we have overreached ourselves, pard; but we can do nothing, though, somehow, I do not believe this redskin messenger's story."

But the other scouts thought differently, and so Buffalo Bill turned to the redskin and said:

"Let my red brother know that we will not kill our foes or mutilate the dead.

"He is wounded and needs rest, so can remain here, while his brother who is unhurt can return to the band and tell them to come back after their comrades and their dead; but some of their ponies we will keep.

"I will take my young men across the river and let my red brothers return at once to their village.

"If they refuse, I will send the braves from the fort upon their trail."

The death song had ceased quickly, and the prisoners seemed happy at the mercy shown them.

The brave whom Buffalo Bill had lassoed was given a pony and told to go after his comrades and bring them back, and the scouts left the dead and wounded in camp to await their coming, while they recrossed the river and went into camp.

This time the messenger was gone but an hour, and the redskins came back by twos and threes, as though dreading a trap.

But their wounded companions called to them that the scouts were not in ambush, and the braves rapidly came up, and lost no time in getting away.

As they filed away in the distance, Buffalo Bill said:

"Well, pard, we have not done so badly, for we have killed more Indians than we had men, wounded as many more, and broken the spirit of the band, while their chief is among the dead.

"Though we did not capture the gold thieves, we know that they did not escape with their treasure.

"Now, I have more work for you to do."

Arizona John and Pony Bob were the two who crossed the river and kept watch upon the Indians.

There was no telling just what they would do.

Still outnumbering the scouts over three to one, they might halt on their trail, return by night, and make an attack upon their foes, whom they would expect to surprise.

But toward sunset Pony Bob returned to say that the Indians had kept steadily on in their retreat, and Arizona John would follow them until dark and then get near enough to try and hear what their plans were.

He would also try and do what the chief had particularly requested, to see if they still had their prisoner, Don Milner, and the two large horses that had been carrying the gold, for Buffalo Bill was very doubtful of the story of the drowning of the two animals in the river in crossing.

Feeling assured that the Indians, if honest in their retreat, would keep on to the junction of the two rivers to the north, and hold on to the head waters of the Powder River, where their villages were, Buffalo Bill was anxious to get on his way.

To get an early start, he decided to cross the river and camp several miles further on the Indian trail, which the scouts would have to follow until they branched off toward the Sweetwater.

This would also cause Arizona John to meet them on his return trail, whatever were the tidings he brought, and if the redskins did intend to come back and attack them, in the hope of getting revenge, they could ambush them on the way.

So the river was recrossed, and a march of several miles made along the trail, when a good camping place was found just as darkness set in.

The horses had become rested, and if there was no disturbance that night they would all, both men and animals, be in fine condition on the morrow to resume their way.

Supper was over, a guard had been set, and the horses were feeding, while the scouts were lolling about the camp-fire chatting, when there came the sound of hoofs.

It was Arizona John, and he was coming at a gallop.

He had caught sight of the camp-fire, and, riding up to it, threw himself from his saddle and said:

"Chief, that's the honorest gang of red cut-throats I ever ran against."

"What's up, John?"

"They are coming back."

"Ah, we must meet them."

"That's just it, and I know the very spot."

"I saw it in daylight as I followed them, and noted it as I came back to-night."

"What have the reds decided upon?"

"They dropped out just before dark, about thirty of their gang, and I tell you they haven't got many more."

"They picked their best ponies, and, while the wounded were in charge of the dead and the outfit, they waited to come back on the trail and tackle us, hoping to give us a little surprise."

"Thanks to you, they won't surprise us a little bit."

"Not much, chief; but we have not got much time to lose, and we want every man, for this time it must be a lesson in manners they won't forget."

"It shall be."

"I will leave the camp here, and one man in charge, while the rest ride for the place of ambush and get into position."

This was the plan, and it was quickly acted upon.

The place of ambush was not two miles from the camp, and to guard against all mistakes the horses were left a quarter of a mile back from it in charge of another of the wounded scouts.

The spot picked out by Arizona John could not have been better for an ambush, for it was where the trail ran down a very steep and rugged hill, filled with boulders on the top and with timber shading them, while below was an open plain.

The chief and his men, six in number, ranged themselves in the best positions, and each man was well protected by a boulder.

Hardly had they gotten into position when the thud of hoofs was heard.

"They are coming."

"We are just in time, pard."

"Let every man pick his redskin and fire when I give the word."

"I hate to fire on a flying foe, but we must give them a lesson this time."

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE TRAIL OF DEATH.

Each grim warrior was doubtless thinking of the revenge he was going to have when they should creep in upon the scouts' camp and strike a deathblow at daylight.

They knew that the scouts had fine horses, good clothes, plenty of blankets and provisions, saddles, bridles, lariats, and a splendid assortment of firearms, with plenty of ammunition.

Then there were the scalps to be taken into consideration, and they would dig up the dead gold hunters and get their scalps, also.

It was to be a grand wipe-out, for it would take much to get revenge for all they had suffered.

Such was doubtless in their minds as they cantered on—to death.

Another moment, and they had reached the base of the hill, the young chief in the lead.

He drew his pony to a walk.

The others came up and the climb up the steep began, the braves still mounted, for an Indian never spares his horse as does a white man.

Like a squaw, the Indian pony is expected to do the work demanded of him—to go until he drops.

The young chief was not twenty-five feet from the muzzle of Buffalo Bill's rifle, and his braves were crowding close upon the heels of his pony, when, like a trumpet blast, came the command:

"Let them have it!"

A half-score of flashes lit up the dark side of the hill, a mingled roar, and the death volley had done its work.

"To your revolvers, men!"

Then, as the mass of ponies and horses was hurled back down the hill, the revolvers of the scouts rattled viciously and wild cries were heard echoing far and wide.

In one wild rush the braves not killed wheeled and sped away in terror, and the dead and dying alone were left upon the field.

Not a shot had been fired by the redskins, so complete was their surprise, so great was their terror.

One-fourth of their number had fallen, and among them were several wounded braves.

To one of them who could ride, Buffalo Bill said:

"Go after your comrades, and tell them to come back for their dead."

"We will not disturb them unless they again attempt treachery."

"Your two chiefs have fallen, nearly half of your band that attacked the gold men have been killed or wounded."

"The paleface braves of Pae-has-ka hit hard, and they will track the red warriors to their villages and strike a blow, if they do not go on their trail now without looking back."

"Pae-has-ka has spoken; let the ears of my red brothers be open to hear."

The Indian was glad to hear and sent his pony away at a run.

Doing what they could for the wounded, the scouts then fell back, Buffalo Bill and Arizona John remaining to watch what the redskins would do.

They had not long to wait before a peculiar cry was heard out on the plain.

It was answered by one of the wounded braves.

Soon after a voice was heard nearer and a question was asked and answered.

Then first one, then two, and other horsemen appeared in sight coming toward the hill.

They came with the greatest caution, although expecting to be greeted with a volley, until one of the wounded braves called to them that the palefaces were gone.

Even then they were not overbold.

But, after a while, they had gathered up their dead, put them on ponies, mounted the wounded warriors, and begun their retreat.

As they moved off, fear impelled them into quickening their pace, and as they disappeared in the darkness on the plain they were in a run.

"They'll bother us no more, John."

"No, indeed, chief."

"Let me tell you what I saw by the flashes of our rifles."

"Yes."

"That young chief I killed was mounted upon one of the large horses of the gold thieves, and that proves the Indians lied in saying that both of the animals were drowned."

"It certainly does, chief."

"Now, why can they not also have lied about Milner's attempted escape and death in the river?"

"Maybe they did."

"I did not really believe he was dead, though he might be."

"If he is a prisoner, we can do nothing to save him now, and they will make short work of him once they get him to their village."

"They will, mighty quick."

"Yet somehow I have a feeling that I will meet that man again, but, come, let us return to camp, for we can still get a fair night's rest, and all can turn in, for there is no need of a guard now."

Buffalo Bill was more than pleased at getting back his splendid horse Buckskin, but he was constantly feeling regret that they had not been able to rescue Don Milner.

He felt, however, that the gold hunter captain had recognized him, and had known that he had done all in his power, with so small a force, to rescue him.

Then, too, the belief would come to the scout that he was not dead, and would yet escape from his captors.

"He is very clever, a splendid plainsman, brave as they make them, and with an iron nerve; so, if the In-

dians did not tell the truth about his having been in escaping, he will puzzle them to hold him a prisoner," he said to Arizona John.

The ride during the day was not a fast one, or a long one.

With three of his men wounded, though slight, Buffalo Bill spared them all he could.

An early camp was made on a creek, and the chief anxious to cover his trail all that he could, although a country the Indians would not enter without good reason.

He did not care to leave a trail that a band of Indians might find and follow.

When the Sweetwater was reached the next day crossed, the trail led northward, and that night the gold hunters near the rock fort was reached.

"Pards, this is to be our reserve camp for some time."

"You can herd the horses up the range, where pasturage is fine, but drive them in at night and possession of this pile of rocks, for you could hold against a big force of redskins."

"I shall leave here before dawn and go alone as scout."

At dawn he left, for he was anxious to see if he could find any trace of another band of gold thieves. If he had hinted he knew were in that country.

As he rode along he suddenly came upon a fresh trail leading from a camp-fire.

The camp-fire was still warm, and there being no wood there, it showed that it would not burn long unless replenished.

A search that was long and thorough at last convinced the scout that there were six different foot-prints they were made by large boots, not with moccasins.

Buffalo Bill unsaddled his horse and staked him to feed.

Then he rebuilt the fire to cook his breakfast, for he always went prepared in that way.

His search of the surroundings failed to find any other tracks.

Getting over with his breakfast, he made a wide complete circuit of the lone camp.

He made discoveries.

The men had not come there mounted, but on foot.

They had come from the northward.

They had returned the way they had come.

Having decided that the men were six in number, came from the northward and come on foot, Buffalo Bill mounted Buckskin and started off upon their trail.

Who were the six men in that wild and deadly country?

Were they also gold thieves?

Whence had they come, for their trail led from an unknown country, as Buffalo Bill believed, save to a few.

One thing Buffalo Bill was particularly glad of, and that was the direction the trail led was northward, the way he intended to take to the Big Horn country.

After following the trail for several hours, and seeing that it still held its northward trend, the scout decided to return to his camp at the rock fort.

If the six men were foes, they were odds he must not meet alone.

If they were scouts from some of the forts, why were they on foot?

So he set out at a good pace to reach camp early and be all ready for an early start in the morning.

Buckskin, therefore, was kept at a brisk pace, and before sunset Buffalo Bill rode up to his camp and was greeted with a cheer.

Dismounting, the chief told his men the result of his day's work, and added:

"We will start before dawn; as they are on foot, we can catch them by to-morrow night or noon the next day, at any rate.

"But we must go prepared for our journey northward, first intended."

CHAPTER XVI.

ON THE FRESH TRAIL.

All arrangements were made that night for a start in the morning, and an hour before dawn the men rode out of camp.

It was noon when the trail of the six men was struck. Often the nature of the country was such that no trail could be seen, and the plainsmen's skill showed itself in guessing at the way those they were following had gone.

The trail was some across a score of miles northward where Buffalo Bill had branched off from it the day before, for he had an idea of the way it led, and took the chance of crossing it far beyond; while, if he did not, he could return to where he had left it and keep on from that point.

Not to lose the time and distance to be gained, however, he ventured, and the result proved his wisdom.

As the pace had been a good one all day, the trail looked very fresh when the night camp was made, and, calculating the speed of those on foot, the chief said:

"We'll catch them early to-morrow, boys."

The next morning all was ready for a move as soon as was light enough to see the trail, and they were not very long in coming upon the camp where the party had passed the night.

The fire had been put out, to prevent its smoke from attracting the attention of roving bands of redskins, could any be about, but the ashes were yet warm.

"Another hour will bring them in sight," said Buffalo Bill.

And in this he was right.

But, unfortunately for the scouts, the country had changed somewhat. There was a large plain, miles across, before them, broken only here and there by timber matter growing amid groups of rocks.

The plain was barren, too, and if the party had not been sighted it would have been very difficult to follow them from their trail, for it would hardly have been visible.

It looked to the scouts as though they had determined to cover up their retreat, and so had sought that very plain, which they knew.

But, as the scouts came out upon the range that overlooked the plains, there they were in full sight. There were six white men and also one other; also a horse. They were a couple of miles out upon the plain when seen.

Taking his glass, the chief looked long and attentively at them, while his men stood by, eagerly awaiting for him to report.

"Pards, I don't know but one of them as far as I can now judge," he said.

Then he continued, talking slowly:

"That one is Don Milner, who the Indians said was dead.

"He escaped with his gold-laden horse, and those men evidently just came up with him, and he is made to carry their packs."

"That means that they are not his friends, pard; and, seeing what I do, I believe they are gold thieves making their way out from the country; but where on earth are they going in this direction?"

None of the scouts seemed able to answer this, and then Buffalo Bill said:

"Well, we have got them in sight, and it will never do to lose them in this plain, for we could not pick up their trail perhaps for days.

"If they are good men and true, recognizing us to be white men, they will be all right.

"If they are outlaws, then they will show fight."

The chief's ideas regarding the party they pursued was shared by the men.

If the six men were not outlaws, seeing white men following, they would feel that they must be friends.

If outlaws, they would fear capture and show fight.

It certainly looked bad for them to see the way they were making Milner carry a load.

This showed that he at least was not in league with them, had not apparently gone willingly with them, and their meeting had been accidental.

They were trudging slowly along over the plain wholly unmindful of what was behind them.

"Pards, that looks like a waterless plain, so we'll give our horses a good drink at that little brook, fill our canteens, and be prepared for what is before us.

"If those fellows do not look behind them, we may get well up before we are discovered."

The men dismounted at the brook, threw off their saddles for a quarter of an hour's rest, filled their canteens, and their horses having had a bunch of grass, they mounted and rode off on the plain.

The men in advance had gotten all of three miles away, meanwhile.

But the canter that Buffalo Bill set soon reduced the distance, and it was kept up until the party ahead were little over a mile away.

"They see us, pards."

It was true, as all could see by the excited movements of the men.

Some one had looked behind and had seen the scouts.

Instantly they turned square off from the way they had been traveling and went rapidly toward one of the timber wastes, already referred to.

It was about an acre in size, rose in a slight mound, and was a pile of rocks overgrown with a thicket.

"They've got a strong fort right at hand.

"We were unfortunate to strike them so near it," said Buffalo Bill.

The scouts were walking their horses now, and were watching the others closely.

They saw them reach the waste, disappearing from sight, and what followed they could only guess.

After a while two of the men appeared upon a rock that rose above the thicket and one was seen to turn a glass upon the scouts.

The two alternatively looked through the field glasses for quite a while, talked excitedly, and disappeared.

Buffalo Bill still led on as before.

He had raised his field-glass to his eyes, and made the remark that six determined men could, in that waste, stand off a large attacking force.

When they reached the spot from whence the men had looked back and discovered them, Buffalo Bill kept straight on.

He seemed to wish to give the idea that they had not seen the men turn off to the waste.

The soil just there was such that the iron-shod horses of the scouts made no imprint.

If the men in the waste were congratulating themselves that they had not been seen, their joy was short-lived; for, after getting well by, Buffalo Bill turned to the left and began to circle entirely around the thicket.

He was about four hundred yards away from the

waste, and he knew what his rifle could do, so wanted to find out what the weapons of the six men could accomplish at that range.

Out in the open plain as they were, the scouts would be at a terrible disadvantage, for they could not even see their foes.

The men in the waste, not counting the prisoner, were six; the scouts were eight in number, but this little advantage did not weigh against the others' position.

But were they friends or foes?

That question was to be decided.

Having circled entirely around the waste, Buffalo Bill called a halt.

Then they all dismounted, the horses were unsaddled and the chief, with a white handkerchief in his hand, stepped out from the others.

No one could be seen at the motte.

All was as silent as death there.

Walking a few paces, the chief laid his rifle upon the ground, took off his belt, and, holding up his hand with the white signal of peace fluttering above his head, he began his walk toward the waste.

He knew that his every movement was seen.

"Don't go too far, chief," called out Pony Bob.

"Let me go, for I'm no good if I get plugged," said Arizona John started toward the chief.

"Go back!" was the stern command, and Buffalo Bill walked on.

A dozen more paces had he gone when there came a sharp report, a bullet hit the hard earth to one side of the scout.

It was an unmistakable command to halt.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT BAY.

Buffalo Bill promptly halted, wheeled and called out "How far did that bullet go, boys?"

"It fell just yonder, sir!" and Arizona John ran to the spot where the piece of lead had hit the ground.

"I wonder if that was fired by their best gun," said Buffalo Bill, in tones he knew must reach the ears of those who had fired upon a white flag.

"Don't go!" came in a chorus from the scouts.

"They will kill you," cried Arizona John.

"If they do kill me, protected by a flag of truce, you men know that it means no quarter to murderers!" cried Buffalo Bill, in tones he knew must reach the ears of those who had fired upon a white flag.

"We know! We'll avenge you, Buffalo Bill!" came in a savage roar from the scouts.

That those in the waste heard their threat there was no doubt.

When Buffalo Bill moved on again, and a dozen paces
farther he went, when there came the stern command:

"Halt!"

He obeyed.

As no more was said, Buffalo Bill called out:

"Well, I have halted."

"If you value your life, go your way with your men,
Buffalo Bill."

"Who are you?"

"Never mind who we are; but you leave this coun-
try."

"I have a right here, as an officer attached to the
army, and you have not."

"We have the right to protect ourselves."

"I have come to you under a flag of truce, and which
you failed to respect."

"We respect nothing. Go your way and leave us to
ourselves."

"Will you surrender your prisoner?"

"What prisoner?"

"You know well who I mean."

"I do not."

There was a silence of over a minute.

It was evident that the words of the scout had sur-
prised them; that they had not suspected he knew that
the man was with them.

"What is your answer?" called out the scout, tired of
waiting for a reply.

"We have no prisoner."

"The man with you?"

"He is a comrade, not a prisoner."

Buffalo Bill was slightly taken aback at this.

"Could it be true?"

"But, no; if a comrade, would he be carrying a pack?"

"No; it was a game to deceive him, and he replied:

"I know who and what the man is, and demand his
release."

"You won't get him."

"Let him answer if he prefers to remain with you or
go with us."

"He will not answer."

"Have you killed him?"

"We would not kill a comrade."

"Who are you?"

"That is none of your business, Buffalo Bill."

"You know me, as I do you, and I demand, as an offi-
cer of the Government, that you surrender and save your-
selves further trouble."

"If you know us, we are not men likely to surrender
and be hanged for our crimes."

"No, we are desperate men, at bay, Buffalo Bill, and
you take us, it will be our dead bodies," came the
firm and determined response.

Buffalo Bill's eyes were opened by the reply.

In saying that he knew them, he had meant that they
were gold thieves.

The reply had proven that they were far worse law-
breakers than men who were invading a forbidden land,
and thus stirring up strife with the Indians which reflect-
ed upon honest settlers elsewhere.

But he wished to know more about them before acting,
so answered:

"In a land where white men are few and far between,
when they meet they should be friends."

"We saw you, and only your hostile attitude caused
us to go slow and greet you under a flag of truce."

"You dishonored it by firing at me, and now you say
you are at bay and will fight us."

"Why should you do this?"

"We are not of your stripe, Buffalo Bill, as you well
know, for you talk smooth to entrap us."

"Who are you?"

"You don't deceive us by pretending not to know."

The scout was about to reply that he did not know
when Arizona John said in a low tone:

"Go slow, chief; I know them."

Showing no sign of having heard Arizona John's
words, the chief returned:

"Well, what are you going to do? Talk quick."

"Fight."

"You refuse to submit?"

"Yes."

"Upon no terms?"

"You know that you have no power to grant terms,
and that we would hang as soon as you took us to the
fort."

"It is the band known, chief, as the Denver Devils,
I'll swear," came in low tones from Arizona John, and
he added:

"I know that man's voice—call him Serpēt Sam."

"Well, Serpēt Sam, you have got to fight," said
Buffalo Bill in a determined tone.

"Ah! I thought you said you did not know me," was
the exultant answer, and a bullet cut through the rim of
Buffalo Bill's sombrero.

Without an order from their chief, each one of the
scouts answered that shot which had so nearly ended the
life of Buffalo Bill.

He was a hundred yards nearer to the waste than they
were, and Arizona John had told the men to fire at a
word, so each one had his rifle ready.

The shot at their chief carried a volley to the spot
from whence the puff of smoke was seen.

This volley beyond doubt saved Buffalo Bill's life, for
it was so wholly unlooked for, so quickly fired, that it
sent the bullets tearing into the waste.

At the moment he had fired, Arizona John dashed forward with Buffalo Bill's horse, at the same time telling the scouts to fall back out of range.

"Well done, John," cried the chief, and, leaping into the saddle, he dashed back with Arizona John to get out of range.

They had hardly done so when there came several shots from the timber, but the bullets did no harm.

Buffalo Bill was too wise a man to stand unprotected on the plain and argue with men who had shown that they would be merciless.

Keeping at a gallop for a short distance, the scouts halted, and they were glad to see that the shots of their foes fell short, while they knew that their rifles would throw a bullet far beyond the motte.

"Pards, I thank you, for that volley saved me, as it kept those other fellows from firing.

"I only hope it did not kill Milner," said the chief.

"The Denver Devils, as I understand, John, are a gang of desperadoes who secretly did a great deal of deviltry, but were found out, arrested after they had killed a sergeant and two soldiers, and escaped from Fort Defiance later by killing their guard.

"They were pursued, but got away, and word was sent to the forts of the Northwest to look out for them, but they were not seen by any one who knew them."

"Yes, chief, that's the gang."

"They have committed more murders and robberies than any band of men in the West, and I knew each one of them before they were known as the devils they proved to be.

"They came north a year ago, and I will tell you now frankly, it was in the hope of finding them that I came up here, for there is a big price on the head of each one of them.

"They were last heard of in Cheyenne, and I believed that they had gotten out of the country, but it seems they had not.

"Their leader is as desperate as they make them, and they have vowed never to surrender, and to take their own lives rather than to do so, when they know that all hope is gone.

"They are the men I want, John, and they must have gone on up into the Big Horn country, and been in hiding—perhaps have been gold hunting and have struck it rich, so were making their way out again.

"If that volley you all fired did not kill Milner, he is certainly in very devilish company.

"But we are going to camp right here on their trail, to take them or drive them to suicide," said Cody, decidedly.

A cheer greeted these words of the scout chief, and the scouts then waited for orders.

The men in the motte, having found that their bullets fell short, had ceased firing, and all was silence there.

The scouts were grouped several hundred yards distant upon the plain, and with no shelter near.

Far away beyond the motte was a ridge where Buffalo Bill's experienced eye told him there were water and grass.

It was some miles distant, however.

"Pards," he said, after a moment of thought, "you are right, it is grass and water beyond doubt.

"There we can keep the horses, half at a time, and two of you boys can keep charge of them.

"We camp around that little abode of the Denver Devils, having our camp right here, while we can encircle the place day and night.

"We all have our canteens for water, and can come here to our camp one at a time for food, by day only, and we must keep to our posts at night and wide awake, for those fellows will get our horses and be off.

"They have not much food, I feel sure, and we will starve them into surrender or death, for there is no water where they are."

CHAPTER XVIII.

A WAITING GAME.

The scouts moved off on either side and just out of range of the bullets that might be sent after them.

Their movements showed the Denver Devils that they had to stand a siege.

The scout chief rode with the two men over to the ridge to see what the country was there and get a view from every side.

He felt confident that there was no water there, for the men were not overburdened with provisions, could not have any too much ammunition, and certainly could not escape from the trap they were in.

If no prowling band of redskins happened along to attack them, there was a certainty that they had to surrender or go to the bottom, and it would be a great achievement to capture or wipe out the band of desperadoes that no one had seen for so long, and so anxious to encounter.

Arriving at the ridge the scouts found there a stream, good pasture land and plenty of wood.

The second camp was pitched there, the horses watered and staked out, and supper was cooked, Buffalo Bill intending to take it back to the camp on the plain.

Signals were agreed upon as a call for help, one of the two men to be constantly upon the watch.

It was to be the raising of a red flannel shirt for a call by day, the lighting of a fire by night.

Each morning one of the men was to come out with the day's food for those on the plain and bring the horses, taking the others back.

ood was gathered up for fires on the plain for a
at night, and, tied in bundles, was swung across
rse.

pole was taken along for a flag by day when needed
signal, and, with his bag of provisions, the chief
nted and started upon his return.

e made the rounds of his men, giving each his sup-
and then put the wood at the camp on the plain
ready to light.

e also erected the pole for the flag, and his position
to be at the camp there.

he other men wishing to signal to him for aid were
ht matches, and all were so placed that he could see

leeping by day, the scouts could watch by night, and
man had mentally vowed that there was no escape
he Denver Devils.

at Buffalo Bill was worried about one thing.

e did not understand about Milner.

e had felt assured that he was in no way allied with
gang, yet why had he not spoken, for he certainly
heard all that was said.

ad they killed him?

ad the fire of the scouts killed him?

ese thoughts troubled the chief of scouts.

was a mystery that must be fathomed.

he sun was now setting, and Buffalo Bill quietly
n to pace to and fro upon his post.

vine other scouts did the same, and the horses kept out
the plain stood silent and discontented, for their
tact told them that there was water and grass where
of companions had been taken.

ot seemed beyond them to reason that their time
d come next.

ere on the plain the soil was hard and dry, there
not a blade of grass or a thing that was alive and
wing.

ight came on, the further scouts faded from view,
those nearer, and soon all was darkness upon the
sm, and a silence that was intense could almost be felt
he watchers.

what must be the feeling of the besieged, thought
fflo Bill.

aire in that waste, besieged as they were, brought
f the end of their trail, they must have cruel, bitter
ghts.

a face their firing they had not been heard from.

at their eyes were upon the scouts the latter well
w.

re they plotting escape? Were there any dead in
midst?

e darkness shut all secrets out.

Silence still brooded upon the besieged outlaws, with
the dawn.

There had been no fire at night, no smoke was seen
now by day to show that they were cooking their meals.

Could it be that they were out of provisions, save what
they had killed along the trail in the way of game?

Far over toward the ridge one of the scouts in the
camp there was seen coming out with the horses and
breakfast.

He came straight to the camp, and Buffalo Bill
signaled for two of the men to come in, which they did.

The supply of food was for the day and plentiful.

The horses brought out were left at the camp; the
others, thirsty and hungry, were taken back.

"Any sign of the chief?" asked the scout, from the
ridge.

"Not a sign or a sound all night."

So each scout reported as he came in for his breakfast.

Noon had come and gone, and Buffalo Bill raised a
white flag on the pole and advanced toward the waste as
far as he dared.

The silence was oppressive.

A shot halted him, the bullet falling spent at his feet.
He waved the flag and he was surprised at the result.

A man stepped out of the thicket and waved some-
thing meant to be white, but which was dirt color.

"Ho, there!" shouted the chief, and the scout further
off heard his clear tones.

"I'll meet you half way," cried the outlaw.

"Ay, ay, come along!"

Buffalo Bill at once walked forward, carrying his flag
with him.

The man also advanced, but slowly.

At last Buffalo Bill halted.

He had gotten to where the scouts had halted the day
before when he had advanced toward the waste.

"You must come here, Serpent Sam."

"I'll come half way."

"I'll go you," and Buffalo Bill boldly walked the dis-
tance.

The outlaw advanced with evident dread.

"Well?"

"What do you want, Buffalo Bill?"

"Your surrender."

"We won't."

"Then we can't trade."

"We can."

"What have you to offer?"

"The prisoner."

"Ah! you wish to trade him?"

"Yes, for you want him."

"I might and I might not."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't want a dead man."

The scout watched the face of Serpent Sam closely as he spoke.

"He's not dead."

"You are sure?"

"He's all right, for we are not fools to destroy our stock in trade."

"All right; what do you want?" and Buffalo Bill eyed the man from head to foot.

He saw a well-built man, a perfect athlete, with clothes terribly worn and soiled, boots run down at the heel and full of holes, long, unkempt hair and beard, a ragged hat, and a face that was a study—it was snaky in appearance.

The weapons of the man were good ones and light, but the rifle was not of recent manufacture.

The face looked haggard, and Buffalo Bill felt that it had a half-starved look.

"If you'll allow us to go our way we'll leave the man safe and sound."

"No, we'll wait and take him."

"No, you won't."

"Why not, for you are as safe as rats in a cage?"

"If you don't accept our terms we'll kill him before your eyes, and then fight it out with you."

The scout did not allow an expression on his face to change as he replied:

"What good is he to us, for he is simply a border wanderer whom you found and have since subsisted upon the provisions he had, for yours were about run out?"

The man looked surprised, while he asked:

"Is not he your pard?"

"He is just what I told you. I will feel sorry to have you kill him, but then his life must not weigh in the balance against you and your band, when I have you all in my power."

"That settles it; he must die."

"I can't help that, but I will say that if you kill him in revenge, because you cannot escape through him, I'll turn you over to one of my men who is very anxious to burn you all at the stake, and he will do it if we find that man dead."

"Who is it you speak of?"

"Arizona John, a scout from the Southwest, on your trail."

"My God! is he here?"

"Yes, he is one of my men, and it is strange you did not recognize him."

"Yes, I know him now, so we can't come to terms; can't trade," and the outlaw turned on his heel and walked back toward the waste.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE CAPTIVE.

Buffalo Bill stood watching the man as he walked away, while a strange expression came over his face.

He had made the threat he did, in connection with Arizona John's name, to note its effect.

It had been wonderful, for the face of the outlaw showed strange emotions.

Arizona John was certainly well known to him.

He was a scout with a splendid record in the west, and when he came up north and had wished Buffalo Bill's company of scouts, the latter had been most willing.

That the outlaws had had reason to fear Arizona John there was no doubt in Buffalo Bill's mind, for the mention of his name had shut out all possibility of terms from Serpent Sam's standpoint.

As for the chief of scouts, he knew that he had power to make terms with these six men.

They had placed themselves far beyond the pale of mercy.

Already they had been tried and sentenced to death.

There was a price upon the head of each, a large sum upon them as a band.

No commandant on the frontier would accept of terms that had been made with them.

Still the chief of scouts was determined to take the man dead or alive.

He saw Serpent Sam walk away like a man without hope.

When he had gone some distance Buffalo Bill turned.

He half expected a shot, but none came, and the outlaw returned in safety to his camp.

The eye of each of his men was upon him.

They wondered what had been decided upon.

A glance over toward the ridge showed one of the men there coming out with the horses and supplying the men.

"No terms, pards," called out Buffalo Bill.

Supper was brought out, the horses changed, and the man from the ridge went back.

"Keep a bright lookout to-night for a signal, for something is going to happen," called out the chief as the man rode away.

Arizona John was the scout then in camp with Buffalo Bill getting his supper, and he was told what had occurred at the meeting.

"He knew I was on his trail, and had vowed to show no mercy, for they killed my best pard, chief, Arizona John, and he added:

"What will you do to-night?"

"You think it best to make some move?"

"They'll never surrender alive, sir, never! When they are good and hungry and see that there's no hope they'll end it all." "Will they kill themselves?"

"Yes, or come out and kill and be killed—Serpent was a dead game man, chief."

"Well, I believe we can save time by ending it for good."

"How so, sir?"

"The nights are very dark, and by creeping in from the posts upon the waste we can locate and attack them in their quarters."

"I will go in first, then make the rounds of the line to get the men, and we can win."

"I believe we can, though we will lose some of our men for they are game, those devils."

"We may have to remain here for a week, perhaps longer, for they must have a little food on hand."

"We cannot spare the time, and then it is the only way I can see to save Milner, for they'll starve him if they do not kill him."

"You are right, chief."

"Shall I put the boys on to it?"

"No, for the outlaws might suspect something, seeing us go to the rounds."

"They will not expect us to attack and risk a fight with desperate men as long as we have them sure by our fire, so they will keep poor watch, I am certain."

"All right, chief; count on me to be there," and then John went back to his post.

The men came in for their supper one by one, and the darkness again fell.

Several hours passed away, and then Buffalo Bill began to prepare for his dangerous approach to the position of the outlaws.

He rolled up several blankets very close, tied stirrups and stirrups to them, and bound them to a corner of the heaviest saddles.

When completed, this made a cumbersome but very effective shield against bullets.

Slipping this with a lariat about his neck, Buffalo Bill moved toward the waste until he got within a hundred yards.

Then he stooped low and began to creep forward noiselessly, the shield rising from the ground to above his head, and if a shot or shots were fired at close range it would surely check them.

Farther and nearer the scout crept until at last he reached the thicket unseen, and crouching there he heard voices not very far from him.

The outlaws were awake, if not watchful.

In their midst, bound and gagged, was Don Milner.

He had taken big chances in his escape from the In-

dians, managing to free his hands and, in the attack of the scouts upon them, to mount one of his horses and ride into the river.

Though fired upon and wounded he got away, and the animal he had secured had the gold, some provisions and a little ammunition in the pack saddle.

He could not recross the river to rejoin the scouts, and, as a result, he lost his way in the darkness, and was compelled to go into camp the next day to care for his wounds, as best he could.

A man of splendid nerve, he dug the bullet out of his wounded arm with his knife, and, utterly exhausted, lay down to rest.

It was night before he awoke, and he could not start until morning, so he dressed his wound again and slept, to awake the next day much refreshed and his hurts giving him little trouble.

After a hearty breakfast, he set out to find the scouts and later came upon the Denver Devils, whom he mistook at first for the companions of Buffalo Bill.

In this he made a sad mistake, for his food was appropriated, his horse and himself were made to carry the outlaws' packs, his weapons and ammunition were taken, and he found himself a prisoner, and was treated in a way that showed they would kill him when no longer useful.

They each had a small bag of gold, and said they had been forced to hide more along the trail, as they had no horses to carry it; also little food, and only a few rounds of ammunition.

And in all of his sufferings Don Milner had faith that Buffalo Bill in some way would find him.

They made good time. At night, Don Milner was forced to sleep between two of them, and they were most watchful of him at all times.

It was well that they were, for he was equally as watchful for a chance to escape.

They appeared as pleased with the ammunition they had gotten, as they were with the food and the horse.

They evidently felt that they had made a great find.

Afraid to trust each other, they were going together to the Overland to get horses and provisions and return for their hidden gold.

Milner first saw the scouts coming in their rear.

He almost made the mistake of uttering a yell of joy.

Well he knew who it was on the track of his captors.

He knew that the pursuers must not be discovered, that they might be connected with him in some way in the minds of his captors, and then his life would be the forfeit.

He was tired, weak, and could hardly keep up with the others, carrying the load he did.

That his captors would kill him if they had to desert him, he felt assured.

So he said:

"There is somebody coming on our trail."

A cry broke from the lips of each man, and their eyes told them that whoever they were, that they outnumbered them, were mounted and would not be long in overtaking them.

"Pards, we are in hard luck, and just as we thought all was well.

"Push for it, push!

"You saw them just in time. We'll make for yonder rock hill, pards."

Then Serpent Sam led the way to the motte, and, reaching it, he at once began to see what the advantages of the situation were.

The horse was hidden among the rocks, a camp placed where bullets would not intrude, and then Serpent Sam and one of his men ascended a rock to reconnoitre.

What they saw did not reassure them, and he said in a low tone:

"That is Buffalo Bill in the lead.

"It has been a long time since I saw him, and I only met him once then, but he's a man not to forget.

"It is to be a death struggle right here, pards, so we'll get ready for it as best we can."

CHAPTER XX.

THE FATAL OATH.

When the scouts halted and Buffalo Bill rode forward alone, Milner made the mistake of allowing his face to reveal his pleasure.

Serpent Sam saw it and at once said:

"I'm on to you, and I believe you are glad those scouts are there. I'll just check your joy."

He was raising his revolver to fire, when one of his men called out quickly:

"Don't kill him, for he may be worth his weight in gold.

"Gag him and rope him, so he can do no harm."

It was a very close call, for the revolver was lowered just as Serpent Sam was about to pull the trigger.

"You are right. We'll see what he is worth to us. Tie him and put a gag in his mouth."

Milner made no resistance.

He was securely bound and a stick was stuck into his mouth as a gag.

What followed has already been told.

When night came on the outlaws gathered together about a small fire, built among the rocks and where no gleam of it could be seen by the scouts.

In the arc of light lay the bound man suffering greatly, with his bonds and his gagged mouth.

Yet his ears heard all that was said, and he knew either release or death was near; but he feared chances were in favor of the latter.

"Pards, you know what's before us," began the leader.

A silence that was deep gave consent.

"Buffalo Bill is on our trail, he has hemmed us, and we might as well think of escaping from the hound as from that man."

The men groaned.

"We are cornered beyond escape, and capture means death by hanging.

"It seemed that luck had come to us, for we were from the lower country to this, which is richer, and only had to *cache* our gold when we could carry it further.

"Then we struck that man; he gave us a big chance, we would have saved us only we have got Buffalo Bill on our trail, and you know what that means.

"Well, here we are, and to-morrow will be here if we are starving for water.

"If taken we hang, so I say keep our oath tight and at the word send a bullet through our hearts."

Again a groan came from the men.

"Don't be cowards, pards.

"We took all chances and are doomed.

"We took oath what we would do, and now it comes terribly hard, it has to be done.

"There is a big price on our heads to be taken, that we may be hanged.

"We'll cut the figure down and be taken dead."

"What do you say?"

A moment of silence followed, and then one of the men said: "We are six, Sam, and a dash might save one of three of us, and we get away.

"Remember, we have got gold, and it's hanging now with life before us."

"Yes, but do you mean that we could get away with a dash?"

"Yes."

"It could not be done.

"We might kill some of the scouts, but so many would be taken alive; none would escape.

"No, we must keep our oath and die like the men we are, now that we have come to the end of the rope.

"If any man here refuses to keep that oath, we will send a bullet through his brain."

"We won't refuse, Sam.

"Give the word," and all repeated the words in a but earnest tone.

Milner scarcely breathed.

had begun to believe that the men had forgotten

next moment Serpent Sam said:

"We'll each one of us put a bullet in him, pard, a bullet in the hand all round, and then we'll turn the muzzle of our guns against our heads, I'll give the word, and pull trigger together."

"We will," was the firm rejoinder.

An appeal for mercy from Milner would have been

in vain. "Pards, we'll hide the gold we have so that accursed dog can't find it, and that which we have *cached* will be found."

The gold was hidden by Serpent Sam among the rocks, and then the outlaws returned to the fire and each drew his revolver as he faced the prostrate prisoner. The outlaws were so taken up with their own doom, bound to die together, as they were at the command of their leader, that they did not keep watch.

None of them supposed the scouts would take any notice of an attack, and they had them so surely by surprise.

Buffalo Bill reached their stronghold and began to move about.

He saw the reflection of the fire, and he gained a rock where he could look down upon the group.

He counted the six, and felt relieved.

One was upon guard, as he had feared.

The light of the fire revealed every face distinctly.

It also revealed Milner, lying bound near the group.

He felt that the man must be released quickly.

That the outlaws were talking about Buffalo Bill he could not distinguish, but their faces showed that they were in deadly earnest in all they said.

"We must lose no time. Now we can all reach the motto when we can act."

Saying, the chief of scouts retraced his way.

He did not heed his shield now, so it was left at the back of the thicket.

Swiftly he walked out upon the plain to his first horse.

It was Pony Bob.

He was alert, and recognizing the scout, said:

"What's up, chief?"

"Go, go round the circle and bring the boys all here.

Lose no time, keep out on the circle line in coming,

Make no sound to show the outlaws where we are."

"All right, sir."

Then Pony Bob went at a trot, as noiseless as a cat's tread.

Buffalo Bill now saw a form advancing.

He did not take a second glance to recognize the form or the broad shoulders of Arizona John.

"John, I have been to the outlaws' camp."

"Just like you, chief."

"They were keeping no watch, but are holding a powder-horn, and something is up."

"Good!"

"They are around a small fire and the prisoner is lying near."

"I shall return to the timber, but you wait here and bring the men when they have all come."

"I will."

With this Buffalo Bill again crept toward the thicket. He reached the rocks and looked down toward the fire. The men were all there, but standing up now.

Milner still lay where he had been before.

Serpent Sam was talking louder than before, and Buffalo Bill caught a few words.

What he heard caused him to quickly retrace his way to the edge of the thicket.

Just as he reached there he saw his scouts coming.

They were stooping low, coming on a line, and not thirty feet away.

"Ho, pard!"

"All ready, sir."

"Follow me in Indian file."

"Ay, ay."

"Have your rifles ready for quick work, and I'll show you a thrilling picture."

The chief of scouts led the way to the thicket, and close behind him followed his men in single file.

They climbed noiselessly over the rocks, and at last reached a point where they saw a glimmer of light.

"In line."

They silently obeyed.

From where they stood now they could see the six outlaws.

They could also see Milner.

The outlaws were standing up in a line. They had their revolvers drawn.

The men stood with bowed heads, and the light of the fire falling upon their faces showed that they were livid, had thrown aside their hats and were strangely nervous.

"Pards, we get what comfort we can in killing that man first."

"He is the one Buffalo Bill is after."

"Fire at the word as I give it and fill him full of lead."

"Then we'll grasp hands across, look each other square in the face to show that not one of us shrinks from keeping an oath, and then when I give the word 'Fire!' pull the trigger."

"We will!"

Every word uttered was heard by the scouts.

"Are you ready, pard?"

Serpent Sam's voice rang out distinctly and without a tremor.

But it was Buffalo Bill's voice that uttered the command:

"Fire!"

The scouts fired at the word of their chief.

The roar of the rifles was terrible, breaking in as they did upon the stillness of the night.

The six outlaws had sunk in their tracks as one man.

All lay motionless save one.

That one was Serpent Sam.

The horse among the rocks snorted wildly and plunged about in a vain effort to get away.

Down toward the camp, over rocks and rough rushes, revolvers in hand, the scouts followed their leader.

The loud tones of their chief were heard:

"Ho! Milner, we fired those shots."

Reaching the fire, more wood was thrown on it by some, others pulled Milner apart from the ghastly group, and Buffalo Bill cut the bonds that held the gag, while Pony Bob began to untie the lariat from his feet, another doing the same to release his hands.

"Here's my canteen," and the scout poured water into the dry and inflamed mouth of the captive.

It nearly choked him, but slowly he revived, though he could not speak.

Seeing that he was recovering, Buffalo Bill turned to Arizona John who had called him.

"Well, John?"

"The head devil still lives."

"Yes."

"But mortally wounded, surely?"

"He must be; but you look at him."

Another fire had been lighted, where was more room. Lying near it was the leader of the Denver Devils.

He was breathing hard, and his breast was stained with blood.

But his eyes were open and he was conscious.

He had recognized Arizona John, who had placed him in as comfortable a position as possible, and had said:

"Beyond your reach now, John Burke."

As Buffalo Bill knelt by his side, there was only sympathy in the scout's look and tone:

"I am sorry you are suffering, pard, and wish you had been as fortunate as your comrades."

"From your lips I believe that, Buffalo Bill."

Buffalo Bill made no reply, and the scouts silence looking on.

The chief had removed his hat, for he stood in the presence of death.

The others had followed his example, Milner far away, sipping water from a canteen to cool his throat and get back his voice.

It was a strange, ghastly scene, one not soon to be forgotten.

After a short silence the outlaw leader spoke:

"You gave the order to fire when it was too late on my lips, Buffalo Bill."

"Yes."

"You saved him."

"We were just in time."

"When he was dead my men intended to kill themselves."

"I heard the words of your fatal oath."

"But I did not intend to kill myself."

"You did not?" asked Buffalo Bill, in surprise.

"Oh, no, born a devil, I would have been a devil to the last."

"How do you mean?"

"I did not intend to kill myself, but the other men."

"The men had given me the gold to hide it, but I left it right over there."

"When that man was dead and my men, intending to grab up that gold, run to the edge of the thicket, and when you and your scouts came here to jump I would have slipped out, reached your camp, taking the horses you had there and the outfit, and run of it for where our treasure is hidden."

"I would have had a long start, a number of days to ride, while you could not easily track me, across the plain, and never could have caught me."

"Yes, I intended to be a devil until the last, but I have gone my way alone; but you thwarted me, and I shall die with the secret untold of where that fortune is hidden."

"That will be your punishment, Buffalo Bill. Ha! ha!"

The laugh was one full of fiendish triumph. Buffalo Bill looked at the man in actual horror.

He had seen many a man die, but never one so hardened as this one was.

He uttered no word, simply placed the cap

to the lips of the man, and did what he could to his intense suffering, for though he uttered no groan, all saw that he was quivering with anguish.

the dying man seemed to desire to remain silent, Bill did not disturb his last moments by asking questions.

simply ordered Pony Bob to go out to the camp, leading the horses to the motte, and Texas Jack accompanied him.

er was getting better, but yet spoke no word.

was busy gargling his throat and watching the outlaw.

is half an hour passed away.

y Bob and Texas Jack returned with the horses, outfit, made them fast in the thicket and came back to fire.

the dying outlaw had not spoken since they had been

was breathing harder and more rapidly now.

they joined the circle again, the eyes of Serpent opened.

ice he made an effort before he spoke, and then in a low tone came the words:

hile I can, I'll say good-by, Buffalo Bill, and you, boys."

the chief of scouts saw him try to raise his hand, and his effort proved vain.

struggled to speak again, but could not.

seemed that he wished to say with his eyes what his tongue refused to utter.

is he going to reveal the secret of his life?

is he trying to tell where that hidden gold could be found?

who can tell?

struggle, a gasp, and the body of the man writhed only as the life spark went out like the flame of a candle.

CHAPTER XXI.

THE HIDDEN GOLD.

Buffalo Bill bent over, clasped the hands above the outlaw's breast, closed the eyes, a short time before so full of defiance and pluck, and then said:

For all his sins what they may, I never saw a braver man."

And this was the verdict of each of the daring men who stood with uncovered heads gazing down upon the body.

The sound of hoofs approaching at a run out on the plain told the scouts that their comrades were coming from the camp by the ridge, for, though no signal had been given them, they had doubtless heard the firing and thought they were needed.

The next minute one of the two men dashed up and had with him all the horses.

This decided Buffalo Bill upon going to the ridge right off, carrying the outfit of the outlaws, with them, the bodies as well, for there the soil was too hard to dig a grave in.

The start was soon after made, Milner mounting his horse.

He could not yet speak, so swollen and inflamed the gag had made his throat and mouth, and the bonds had caused his ankles and wrists to swell up and be painful.

Once in the camp by the ridge, however, he was kindly cared for, and at once dropped off to sleep, the scouts soon after following his example.

Sunrise showed a pleasant camping place in a meadow under a cliff, and upon the banks of a small stream, and Buffalo Bill determined to remain there until the following morning and allow the men and horses to fully recuperate.

Then, too, he wished Milner to get in trim again.

He was glad to find that he could speak once more, and the swelling in his limbs had gone down.

The scouts gazed at him with decided interest.

Breakfast over, the scouts set to work to dig a large grave for the outlaws, and, as a pick and shovel had been brought along, it was not a difficult task.

The bags of gold which Serpent Sam had decided to appropriate were found, and this was to go into the scouts' treasury to be equally divided, while Milner was allowed his share.

The wish of the scouts was that the large treasure of the outlaws could be found, and of which the leader would not tell, and they believed that if they kept right on there they might be able to follow the trail to the hiding-place.

The dead outlaws were laid to rest in one grave, and then the scouts devoted themselves to cleaning their fire

arms, patching up bridles and all else that needed it, and getting ready for the start on the morrow.

A bath in the stream and the dressing of his wounds afterward greatly refreshed Milner, and he said that he would be all right for the march on the morrow.

Going to where Don Milner was lying upon his blanket, Buffalo Bill sat down by him and said:

"You have had a hard time of it, pard. I will tell you now frankly that I came up into this country looking for lawless gold hunters we call sneak thieves. I believed Serpent Sam had a large force and was allied with the Indians, but in that I was mistaken. I also believed there were other bands, but I guess the Denver Devils and yours were all."

"Yes, though others have been here and have been killed by the Indians or have perished. My party was in hard luck, and the Denver Devils were half starved and afoot. I came here, Chief Cody, to make my fortune, without regarding the lawless side of it as I should have done.

"I confess to you that I could only win the hand of the girl I loved by matching her riches, for her father had no use for a poor young doctor for a son-in-law.

"She loved me, but would not marry me against her father's will, as he was old and an invalid.

"So I came gold hunting, and bad luck dogged me until I came here, I have considerable gold, and know where to find what my comrades had, and I suppose I am their heir.

"Then I believe, from what I heard the outlaws say, I can find their gold, to turn over to you and your men, and in part repay you for what you have done for me."

"You are a good fellow, Don, and no mistake; but have you enough money to win your girl with?"

"I think so, and I will make a try, at least."

The scouts were all in favor of going on in search of the outlaws' gold.

Who could blame them?

They worked hard for what was really small pay, indeed, for the service rendered, and the terrible risks they had to take.

If each one of them could get a nice slice of a fortune from finding the gold hidden away by the Denver Devils, they were certainly entitled to it.

By what they had already gotten they had added to their earnings very considerably, and they only hoped that the search would pan out rich for them.

So the next morning the start was made, the outlaws had been following, their own, was for every man had his eyes open for the tracks of for they were not easily found or followed.

Milner was mounted, and said that he felt all

At noon the plain had been crossed and the entered the mountains.

There were the six tracks of the worn bait wearers then in their grave, and they led up and Milner said that the outlaws had found the from its hiding-place, but had brought it as far could and then buried it.

He further reported that they had hidden it break in a cliff.

Cliffs were found, crevices innumerable, but a fortune in gold in them.

The trail had been lost in the rocky soil of a and the scouts were unable to find it again.

The sun went down and the scouts camped near they believed was the hiding-place of the gold, ner was questioned over and over again the around the camp-fire to tell all that he had outlaws say.

The next day with renewed hope the search up.

Noon came, but the treasure had not been four

Night fell, but the gold was still resting in its hiding-place.

The next morning the return march was taken the fort. After still another vain search had been for the hidden gold.

On the return trail, Buffalo Bill and Dr. Don ner, as he said his name was, rode much together the two rapidly became friends.

"I saw you in Denver once, doctor, as I told you do you know I have heard your full name before lately, I feel sure, though I am unable to tell when."

"Strange, for I was known out here only as Don Milner, Chief Cody."

Buffalo Bill rode on in silence, to suddenly a loud whistle, while his face lighted up as he said:

"I have placed you."

"Good! When and where?"

"I was asked by a young lady, and a pretty one whom I had half a day's ride on a stage coach

go, if I had ever met, or heard out here of a Dr. Milner?"

A young lady asked you?"

One who was then on her way to Fort Fetterman, teacher of the children of the officers stationed at the fort, you say?"

and I left her there when I came off on this trail to hunt down the gold thieves."

Do you recall her name?"

Yes, it is Miss Kate Hughes, and——"

At God! Kate Hughes in this wild land, and a girl?"

The face of Donald Milner had turned strangely white. The entire fort, from colonel to drummer and all, are in love with her, and with good reason for she showed what she was made of the day I met her, and which I'll tell you about."

Do you do," and Donald Milner spoke pleadingly.

So Bill told the story of Kate Hughes coming to the fort, how she had saved his life, and how she had been engaged as teacher through an advertisement in a newspaper, which she had answered.

He did not see me when I left and wrote this little note, good-by," and he took out the note.

From her writing—I thought there must be some mistake, but there is none—it is Kate Hughes. I have not heard from her for more than a year; but why is she gone? Can her father be dead, and he have left her alone? I hope so, for I can take good care of her now. Mr. Cody, she is the girl I told you of, the one who came out here to seek a fortune for."

Well! and you bet you'll find such a girl true as I did hear that her father was dead, and instead of inheriting a fortune, she was forced to earn her living."

Mr. Cody, when we reach the fort I am in your power. Go to her and tell her whom you found, a law-abiding girl in the Indian country, and upon her answer I will pay my hope of happiness."

He said not much upon squaring love affairs, doctor, but I guess I can fix this one up all right," was Buffalo Bill's answer, and he looked really happy over the prospect.

A great deal of anxiety was being felt for Buffalo Bill

and his scouts by Colonel Dandridge and others in the secret of their going, at Fort Fetterman, when one night the daring rough riders arrived.

The chief of scouts sent his men to their quarters, and then, as Colonel Dandridge had not retired, he told Dr. Milner to accompany him.

He was most warmly welcomed back and introduced Dr. Milner. Then he told his strange story, the colonel giving the young gold hunter a cordial greeting and adding:

"We will not hold it against you, doctor, your lawless gold hunt, under the circumstances, and we who know Miss Hughes, the Girl in Gray, as we call her, can hardly blame you for taking big chances to win her.

"She has a likeness of you in her study, which she seems to prize highly, and I guess you are the obstacle that has caused her to say nay to so many of my handsome young officers, for out here one falls in love quickly.

"I congratulate you, I assure you, and in the morning will tell the Girl in Gray of your coming, and expect you both to breakfast with Mrs. Dandridge and myself, Scout Cody being the only other guest."

The coming of Donald Milner was a severe blow to the hopes of many, but all voted him a splendid fellow, and wished him happiness, for none could doubt that he held the heart of the beautiful Girl in Gray.

Kate Hughes would not give up her position as teacher until the colonel had secured some one in her place, and then, as all urged it, her marriage to Dr. Donald Milner took place at the fort, after which the happy couple started eastward to seek a home, Buffalo Bill and his scouts being the escort of the coach during the first four days' journey on the trail.

It was but a few weeks after their departure that Buffalo Bill and his faithful scouts received a remembrance from the doctor in the shape of a complete scouting outfit, with weapons and all, and also acceptable gifts from his lovely wife, who was long remembered in Borderland as the "Girl in Gray."

THE END.

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